GEAR GUIDE 2023 $16

OVERLAND JOURNAL

PL
DSR
62099

INDIA | WINCHES | MISSISSIPPI | SOLAR PANELS

VISIT…

LANZAROTE

Caliente.COM

IMPERIAL OUTDOORS
IMPROVING QUALITY STANDARDS AROUND THE GLOBE.

Factory Authorized Distributor
COLORADO RV CENTER
Since 2002

XPLORE RV
PROUDLY BUILT IN U.S.A.

COMPLETELY OFF-GRID CAPABLE | 4-SEASON COMFORT | RUGGED DURABILITY

5 YEAR CRUISEMASTER WARRANTY
3 YRS STD + 2 YRS ONLINE EXTENSION - T&C'S APPLY

SUITABLE TERRAINS	HIGHWAYS/ SEALED ROADS	DIRT ROADS	PROLONGED CORRUGATIONS	ROCK CRAWLING

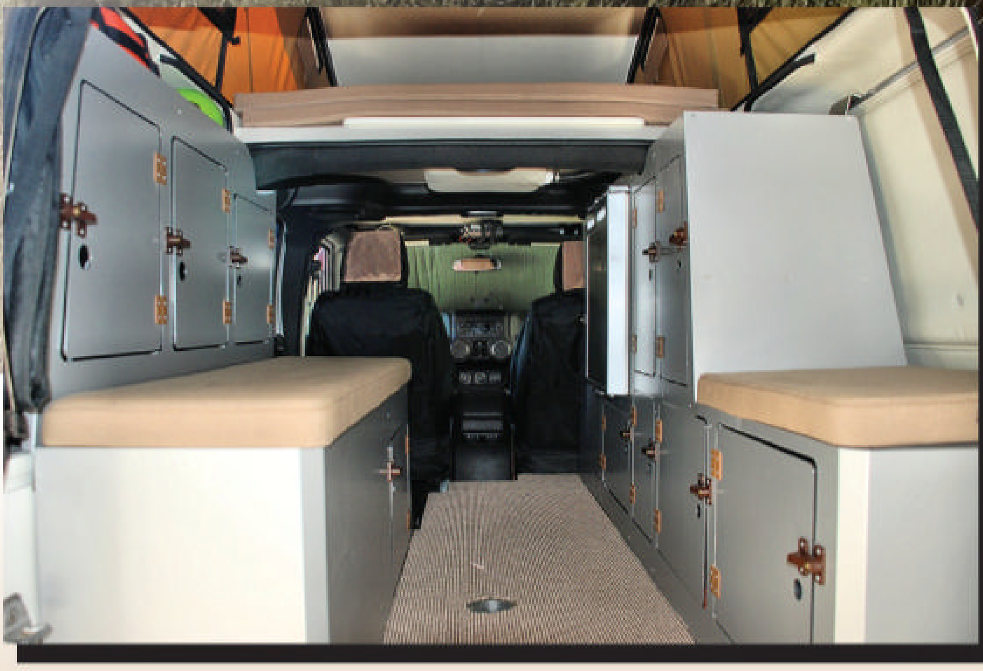
www.imperial-outdoors.com | www.coloradorvcenter.com

introducing the

AMERICAN SAFARI

extended Jeep® Vehicle, SUV, Camper, Overlander

AMERICAN SAFARI JXL



• turnkey AMERICAN SAFARI JXL-installed Jeep® models available • pop-up roof tent included on all models
custom options • sleeps two to four • toilet, sink, shower systems with cooking surface and dining table
interior option for custom cargo, camping, overlanding, or other builds

© 2022 Red River Rigs LLC. ™, trademark of Red River Rigs LLC. • American Safari JXL™ is not a Jeep product. Jeep is a registered trademark of Chrysler Group LLC. • PATENT PENDING

JXL™
and more … you decide!
AMERICAN SAFARI JXL
Jeep Xtended Length
15"=50%

The JXL's 15-inch extended length equals 50% more cargo room behind the second row for more

- hauling capacity
- interior configuration options
- overland/camping build possibilities
- kids, groceries, soccer balls, and dogs!

- two factory camper configurations and
- unique internal storage solutions
- "open"

AMERICAN SAFARI JXL™
Jeep Xtended Length

FOR MORE INFORMATION: AmericanSafariJXL.com • 833.810.1043

Endless opportunities

Sony has been the leader in mirrorless with its revolutionary Alpha line of cameras. With that comes the E-Mount: One mount that enables you to utilize our lenses on APS-C to Full Frame bodies, both photo and cinema. From sensitivity, resolution, and versatility—Sony Alpha cameras are built for all, delivering exactly what you need.

AlphaUniverse.com

© 2021 Sony Electronics Inc. Sony and the Sony logo are trademarks of Sony Corporation. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. All other trademarks are trademarks of their respective owners.

α
ALPHA
SONY
SONY
SONY

GEAR

19 **Field Tested:** Kodiak Blanket, Moonshade Awning, Volcon Grunt, Outdoor Research SuperStrand

27 **Living the Snow Peak Way: It's More than a Lifestyle, It's a Movement,** Tena Overacker

47 **Pull Your Weight: Five Synthetic-rope Winches Are Put Through Their Paces,** Sean Gorman

73 **Blanket Statement: Camp Blankets That Address Specific Needs,** Ashley Giordano

81 **A Place in the Sun: The Right Solar Panels for Your Intended Application,** Richard Giordano

101 **Feature Vehicle: 1984 Mercedes-Benz 508D,** Ashley Giordano

FEATURES AND DEPARTMENTS

12 **The Feed**

34 **The Lost Tusk: India Burns a Place in Your Heart,** Joe Fleming

60 **Mississippi by Morning: The Sweet Land of the South,** Marianne Todd

92 **Lost and Found: The Alaska Marine Highway by Ferry,** Mary Ashley Krogh

109 **Historic: 1959 TransAfrica Expedition in a Bedford QLR Truck,** Tony Fleming

121 **What's in Your Drawers?: Expedition Overland's 2021 Toyota Tacoma,** Ashley Giordano

123 **Modern Explorers: Eva zu Beck,** Ashley Giordano

133 **Destinations: Uzbekistan,** Karin-Marijke Vis

141 **Skills: Water Sourcing, Filtration, and Storage,** Graeme Bell

148 **Overland Chef: Moroccan Spiced Chicken,** Fresh Off the Grid

152 **Tail Lamp: Broken Leg on Bright Angel,** Jon Lane Sullivan

On the cover: Eva zu Beck's 2006 Land Rover Defender 110 conversion has allowed her to slow down, have the sense of a continuous journey, and, most importantly, feel free. Photo by Pytlik&Bak
Table of Contents: History and land intersect along the iconic roads and trails of Mississippi, telling a tale nearly 10,000 years old. Photo by Marianne Todd
Back cover: Spring and early summer evenings in the Rockies require the comfort of a warm blanket, the glow of a crackling fire, and a cup of hot coffee. Photo by Richard Giordano

AEV
PROVEN WORLDWIDE.™
AEV-CONVERSIONS.COM
AEV
WARN
TEIN

EEZI-AWN
100% ALUMINUM ROOF RACKS

EQUIPT

EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR OF NATIONAL LUNA, EEZI-AWN, ALUBOX & ESCAPE GEAR • LEARN MORE AT EQUIPT1.COM

TOUGH ENOUGH
FOR ANY ADVENTURE

Truma Cooler
Portable Fridge/Freezer
Simply Better

truma.net

truma

OVERLAND
JOURNAL

WE ARE ADVENTURERS | Constantly traveling.
Testing and using gear in real-world situations.
Gaining experience, which we readily share.

OUR RESUME

7 continents | 161 countries | 496 years combined experience

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

WE ONLY KNOW THINGS WHEN WE LIVE THEM

GEAR 2023

PUBLISHER AND CHAIRMAN Scott Brady
DIRECTOR OF DESIGN Stephanie Brady
EDITOR IN CHIEF Tena Overacker
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER Christian Pelletier
CHIEF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER Brian McVickers
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER Andre Racine
DIRECTOR OF EUROPEAN OPERATIONS Michael Brailey
SENIOR EDITOR Ashley Giordano
4WD SENIOR EDITOR Graeme Bell
MEDICAL EDITOR Dr. Jon Solberg, MD, FAWM
ARCHAEOLOGY SENIOR EDITOR Bryon Bass, PhD
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Joe Fleming, Tony Fleming, Fresh Off the Grid, Richard Giordano, Sean Gorman, Mary Ashley Krogh, Sam Schild, Jon Lane Sullivan, Marianne Todd, Karin-Marijke Vis
SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER Bruce Dorn
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS Pytlik&Bak, Richard Giordano, Katja Smurakova, Coen Wubbels
COPY EDITORS Arden Kysely, Jacques Laliberté
TECHNICAL EDITOR Chris Ramm
CARTOGRAPHER David Medeiros
PODCAST HOST Matthew Scott
PODCAST PRODUCER Paula Burr
VIDEO DIRECTOR Ryan Keegan
OPERATIONS MANAGER Garrett Mead

CONTACT
Overland Journal, 3035 N Tarra Ave, #1, Prescott, AZ 86301
service@overlandjournal.com, editor@overlandjournal.com,
advertising@overlandjournal.com, 928-777-8567

MOVING?

Send address changes to service@overlandjournal.com. Include complete old address as well as new address. Allow two to four weeks for the change to become effective. Overland Journal is not forwarded by the US Postal Service. It is the subscriber's responsibility to inform Overland Journal of an address change.

Overland Journal is a trademark of Overland International, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Overland Journal is a wholly owned subsidiary of Overland International.

NO COMPROMISE

We carefully screen all contributors to ensure they are independent and impartial. We never have and never will accept advertorial, and we do not allow advertising to influence our product or destination reviews.

slee
OFFROAD
AMERICAN MADE ★ BUILT TO LAST
QQH-609
1-888-4X4-SLEE
WWW.SLEEOFFROAD.COM

INDIAN OCEAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN

YUKON
LARGER THAN LIFE

ROW 1
@el.vagamundo
Climb to admire the Segla and its sheer cliffs, 400 meters above the fjords.

@windingwheels
From the top of Franschhoek Pass, we ride down to the coast. The road leads us to Cape Agulhas, the southernmost point of Africa, [where] we are welcomed by high winds and rugged rock formations. The Cape is where the Atlantic Ocean meets the significantly warmer Indian Ocean, which makes a day at the beach very appealing from now on.

@seeknenjoy
Yup, this will do! Proper distancing by @ryan_clowers. Summer can['t] come soon enough.

ROW 2
@Nomad_exp3dition
On the way.

@offroadscholars
Desayuno de campeones con el gran amigo *@cascadasenhonduras* y Lincoln. Translation: Breakfast of champions with my great friend @cascadasenhonduras and Lincoln.

@its.samantha.woodworth
“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” –Albert Einstein

ROW 3
@busleven
[In the Truso Valley], mineral springs full of carbonated water come up from the inside of the earth in clean blue pools or rusty pipes like these.

@tucks_truck
We got stuck [in the Yukon] for over three months during the first ’rona virus lockdown, parked up outside the Whitehorse Visitor Centre. The wonderful people of Whitehorse baked us cakes and cookies, brought us moose meat, gifts of local produce, and always a friendly welcome. Just passing by on our way to Alaska, but it feels a bit like coming home.

@goplay.outside
Home. One of the important design lessons we’ve learned was to incorporate complementing materials and layers. To us, that meant well-grained wood, brass/copper/leather accents, and of course, plants.

REAL-WORLD **EXPERTISE**

As an automotive engineer specializing in chassis and body integrity, I was pleasantly surprised to find such an informed article in the Summer 2022 issue. Roof loading [“How Much is Too Much?”] and GVW (gross vehicle weight) is such an important part of what I do, and it is great to see a magazine take on a topic so often overlooked. The author [Sean Gorman] obviously knows the engineering involved, but also [includes] real-world applications. I’ve never read something that combines the expertise to inform an engineer and the explanation that would relate the importance to the average reader. Thank you, *Overland Journal,* for providing a beautiful magazine and a tremendous source of real-world expertise.

Josh Warner
1993 Mitsubishi Montero

SMELL THE **ROSES**

I’ve listened to every episode of your podcast. It is the one I look most forward to each week. I know you tightly edit the audio of podcasts, [including] the pauses in normal speech. [It] was something that took me a few episodes to recognize, and your team does well with it. However, there have been a number of instances where the editing and cutting are so extreme that context and meaning are lost. You put out incredible content. We, your dedicated listeners, might just benefit from slowing down to enjoy it in all its natural splendor—pauses and all.

Brice Noonan

RESPONSE FROM PODCAST PRODUCER PAULA BURR:
Thank you for your feedback and for taking the time to listen. Recently, we have been hosting podcasts in the field, and it is challenging to get the audio correct, or there are instances when the audio could be clearer. We often have requests from interviewees to edit their answers after the fact, which contributes to the disconnect you mention. As with any creative project, new ideas are in the works.

SHARE
Use **#overlandjournal** on Instagram or Facebook.

WHERE HAS YOUR OVERLAND JOURNAL BEEN?
Send us a photo, along with your name, the location, make/year of your vehicle, and a brief description. **editor@overlandjournal.com**

CORRECTIONS:
In Fall 2022’s “Air to Spare,” the stated published manufacturer CFM for the ARB Twin Portable Compressor was listed incorrectly and should have read 6.16 CFM.

In Fall 2022’s The Feed, Row 1, “@landroverdiscovery2” should have read @overlanddiscovery2.

AT
OUTDOORS FOR GOOD
CAMPERS
TOPPERS
EQUIP.
AT ATLAS
ATERRA XL
AT SUMMIT
AT HABITAT
START YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE AT ATOVERLAND.COM

Photo by Alan Shenton

JOE **FLEMING**

A born and raised American, Joe has been living in South Africa for the past five years with his wife, Monique, her son, Madden, and their now four dogs. He and Monique built South Africa's top beard grooming brand, Bonafide Beards, along with Africa's trendiest barber shop, Bonafide Barbers. Joe is a motorcycle enthusiast who, after a year of growing Bonafide Beards, found the need to bring together like-minded individuals who ride. That is when the community of Bonafide Moto Co was created. He has a passion for adventure, rock climbing, documenting his travels, and encouraging his international audience to come and experience his new home and country of South Africa.

SEAN **GORMAN**

Raised in the mountains of Colorado, Sean Gorman was born to explore. After climbing the highest peaks in the US, he set his sights on guiding some of the world's highest mountains. Sean's first car, a 1961 Land Rover Series IIA that he still owns, became a tool that enabled him to develop his love for off-road exploration. He started his own business, combining the guiding skills from multi-month mountain expeditions and his zeal for off-pavement, vehicle-based travel. Sean now consults on vehicle development and designs driving programs for automotive manufacturers. If you can't find him in some remote corner of the world, you might find him piloting his vintage airplanes around the sky.

MARY ASHLEY **KROGH**

Mary Ashley Krogh (MAK) has been living and working from the road since early 2016 with her husband, Owen Chikazawa. The couple decided to leave their studio jobs and home in Atlanta, Georgia, behind so they could hit the road in search of inspiration for their creative work and gain access to the surfing, climbing, backpacking, and wildlife they love. MAK is a freelance photographer (both digital and film) and filmmaker whose work focuses on traveling and the personal development that stems from it. With a deep love for learning about the world around her, MAK is a firm believer that there are no strangers in this world, just friends she hasn't met yet.

RICHARD **GIORDANO**

Richard Giordano completed a 48,800-kilometer overland journey from Vancouver, Canada, to Ushuaia, Argentina, with his wife, Ashley, in their well-loved but antiquated 1990 Toyota Pickup. On the zig-zag route south, they hiked craggy peaks in the Andes, discovered diverse cultures in 15 different countries, and filled their tummies with spicy ceviche, Baja fish tacos, and Argentinian Malbec. That trip catapulted Richard into a career as a freelance video producer, photographer, and writer. He has created commercials for Toyota Canada and is always itching to hit the road and share his adventures. If you see Richard out in the wild, he'll most likely have a coffee in one hand and a camera in the other.

MARIANNE **TODD**

Marianne Todd has been a professional photojournalist and writer since 1987. Her career began in newspapers and rapidly spread into national news magazines. Her work has been featured on the pages of *Time, Life, National Geographic, Newsweek,* and the *Wall Street Journal,* where she was nominated for Photographer of the Year International. Todd became a publisher in 2009, creating titles reflecting the music, arts, and tourism industries of the South, and her work as the official photographer for Governor Haley Barbour led her to photograph everything from Hurricane Katrina to presidential visits. Since moving to New Mexico four years ago, she has left hard news coverage to travel on her trusty BMW F 750 GS, journeying the roads of America and beyond.

KARIN-MARIJKE **VIS**
COEN **WUBBELS**

Freelance writer Karin-Marijke Vis, along with her partner, photographer Coen Wubbels, combine their love for adventure with work they enjoy. Sometimes described as the "slowest overlanders in the world," they believe in making connections and staying in a place long enough to do so. In 2003, the couple purchased an antique BJ45 Land Cruiser and began a three-year trip from their home in the Netherlands to Asia. Terminally infected by the overland bug, they traveled in South America for nine years and in Japan and South Korea for two years. They are currently making their way through Russia and Central Asia. They've been published in magazines around the world and were awarded Expedition Portal's coveted Overlander of the Year Award in 2013.

WOLFRIGS.com
PATTON

THE PATTON

AMERICAN MADE

Starting at $350k,
purchase your adventure today!

www.wolfrigs.com @wolfrigsusa

WOLF RIGS

TONY **FLEMIING**

In the 1950s, Tony was an apprentice at the de Havilland Aircraft Company in Hertfordshire, England. After completing his apprenticeship, Tony spent time in Africa—including hitchhiking from what was then Rhodesia to Kenya. In 1959, he joined a TransAfrica expedition, organized by colleagues he had known at de Havilland. Following the journey, he moved to Southeast Asia, where he became involved in boatbuilding, culminating in the founding of Fleming Yachts, which continues to design and build quality motor yachts to this day. Since his retirement in 2008, Tony has cruised more than 90,000 nautical miles in his boat, making documentary videos describing his journeys.

SAM **SCHILD**

Sam Schild is a writer and outdoor adventurer based in the American West. His first outdoor love was adventure travel by bike. After a 7,000-mile bicycle tour ended at the Pacific Ocean, he confirmed he needed to make the West his home and moved to Colorado over a decade ago. He's kept the adventures going: bikepacking the Kokopelli Trail and Colorado Trail multiple times; bikepacking countless other bike routes across the Southwest; thru-hiking the Pacific Crest Trail, Continental Divide Trail, Grand Enchantment Trail; and more. He camps in his converted Honda Element, which serves as a basecamp for the next adventure. And if he's not out somewhere, he's scheming where to go next.

JON LANE **SULLIVAN**

Jon lived in the Sichuan Province of China for four years as a trekking guide and English teacher. It was the ultimate base camp for adventure to pursue virgin peaks, ice climb in remote regions, and partake in excellent street food. He was eventually lured back to Colorado to pursue a career in solar energy and raise a family. After pioneering the solar coaster for many years, Jon realized his kids were growing up fast, and it was time to stop the nine-to-five life and bring the family on a big adventure. He is a travel fanatic who hopes to spark the same wanderlust in his kids as they overland into Central America and beyond.

FRESH **OFF THE GRID**

Megan McDuffie and Michael van Vliet are the couple behind the camp cooking blog Fresh Off the Grid. They've spent the past few years traveling around the country in their self-converted Ford Transit camper van. In the summer of 2019, the two got married in Yosemite National Park and hiked the 211-mile John Muir Trail for their honeymoon. They have since moved to Central Oregon, where they continue to develop and share delicious camping recipes as they explore their new home base in the Pacific Northwest. Their goal is to elevate your outdoor experience through food and drink.

OVERLAND
JOURNAL

SUBSCRIBE | overlandjournal.com

Overland Journal is the original publication for environmentally responsible, worldwide vehicle-supported expedition and adventure travel.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES
5 issues/year, online at overlandjournal.com or
3035 N Tarra Ave, #1, Prescott, AZ 86301

DOMESTIC & CANADA (USD)
1 year $65

EUROPE (EUR)
1 year €65

INTERNATIONAL (NON EU) (USD)
1 year $95

DIGITAL
Available on iTunes, Google Play, and the Zinio newsstand.

Expedition
Portal

EXPEDITIONPORTAL.COM

THE WORLD'S LARGEST OVERLAND COMMUNITY

WAY AHEAD.
BILSTEIN
REMOTE WORK.
BILSTEIN

BILSTEIN B8 5160 for JL Wrangler & JT Gladiator

- Remote reservoir
    - Increases wheel travel
    - Improves heat dissipation
- 46mm piston monotube design
- Lift height options: 2-3" and 3-4.5"
- Application specific tuning
- Includes reservoir mount kit
- OE specific hardware
- Optional billet clamp (shown)
- Limited 2 year warranty

bilstein.com

ALL TERRAIN, ALL THE TIME

When the toughest trails hit back, it takes a bulletproof rig that's purpose-built and performance-ready to get you through. WARN® winches, bumpers and ulta-rugged off-road accessories are designed, engineered and tested to the extreme so you can build it, trust it and go prepared, all the time.

GO TO **WARN.COM** TODAY TO SEE THE FULL LINE OF OFF-ROAD PRODUCTS

HUB
WIRELESS RECEIVER

WARN HUB Wireless Receiver

WARN Epic Wheels (Jackhammer)

WARN VR EVO 10-S Winch

WARN Elite Bumper for the Ford Bronco

Life Giving Warmth Kodiak Heating Blanket

Shielding you from cold temperatures without being tethered to a power cord.

Life Giving Warmth was started by Paul and Carolynne LaRue to keep their daughter, Brianna, warm while out on adventures. Brianna has cerebral palsy and needs to stay warm because of the poor circulation her disease causes. So out of necessity, the company was born with the creation of the Cozee, the world's first-ever battery-powered heating blanket.

Now, Life Giving Warmth has created the Kodiak, a rugged battery-powered blanket for those who love the outdoors. In anticipation of the season turning, I tested this new offering in some colder temperatures at high elevations. It made late-night stargazing sessions cozier and kept me comfortable for hours past bedtime without having to retreat to my sleeping bag.

Once you charge the two included batteries in advance, you can take this blanket anywhere. It's ideal for anyone who gets cold easily and is also useful for hunters, surfers, or those exposed to frigid conditions.

The most striking thing about this blanket is how warm it makes you without feeling hot. Many heating blankets provide inconsistent heat, where it's hot enough to burn your skin in some spots and cold in others. The Kodiak generates a uniform temperature with no areas too hot to touch, even on bare skin. But when it's draped over you in a cold environment, it will keep you warmer than you thought possible.

> It made late-night stargazing sessions cozier and kept me comfortable for hours past bedtime without having to retreat to my sleeping bag.

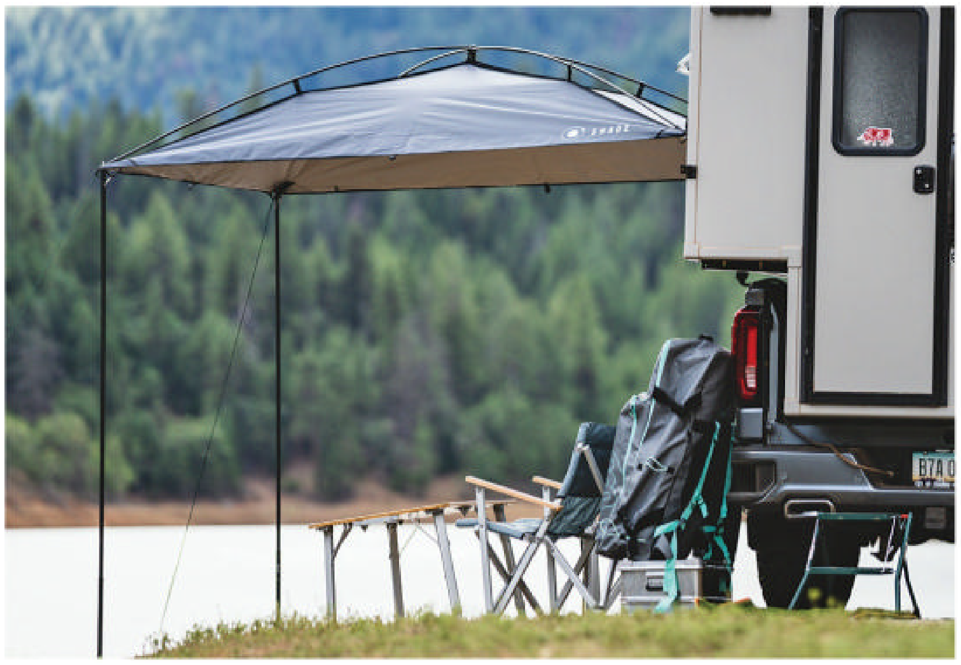
The blanket's interior is a fleece that's just as soft as your favorite wrap from home. The material feels good tucked around your shoulders, and the exterior is made of durable, water-resistant woven nylon to protect you from wind, rain, and snow. A small pocket on the blanket's interior where the power cord comes out keeps the cord safe from an accidental kick.

One of the included batteries has "surge technology," which is fast charging for a heating blanket, allowing it to go from cold to full warming power in under five minutes. The main battery with surge technology lasts for three hours. The other included battery (without surge technology) doubles the total warming time to a full six hours.

An AC wall plug or DC car charging plug can charge both batteries. Both of these charging cords are included with the Kodiak blanket. Also included is a shoulder bag for storage that works to carry everything from your vehicle to camp or wherever the sunsets look best. Here's to staying warm, no matter the season.

$600 | LIFEGIVINGWARMTH.COM

CBIOFFROAD.COM
PRINSU.COM
#CBIOFFROAD
#PRINSU
#CBIEQUIPPED
#THATPRINSULIFE
ARE YOU
ADVENTURE
READY?
cbi
THE ORIGINAL
PRINSU
TRAIL PROVEN



Moon Fab MoonShade

A portable awning that ticks all the right boxes.

Simple is nearly always better than complicated, and lighter is frequently superior to heavy. Such is the case with the new MoonShade by Moon Fab, an impossibly compact (when stowed), simple, and light awning suitable for most overland applications. When I first purchased my Scout camper, I wanted to forgo the heavy, bolted-on wing awning and instead chose this 9- by 7-foot stowable unit, which only weighs 8 pounds and fits in a 28-inch long soft case.

The MoonShade uses 13-millimeter tension poles to create a sturdy support for wind buffeting and rain shedding. Nineteen-millimeter telescoping support poles set the height and angles, along with stakes and guylines, to limit lifting during gusts. What separates the MoonShade from other awnings we have tested is the supplied and available accessories, like the 19-millimeter strut pole, which provides structure to the mounting edge to allow for atypical attachment positions. I used the heavy-duty suction cups to attach the awning, which worked well on a clean, flat surface (the side of the Scout). Additional mounting options include rack, rail, magnetic, and adhesive mounts, carabiners, and vehicle-specific rack mounts.

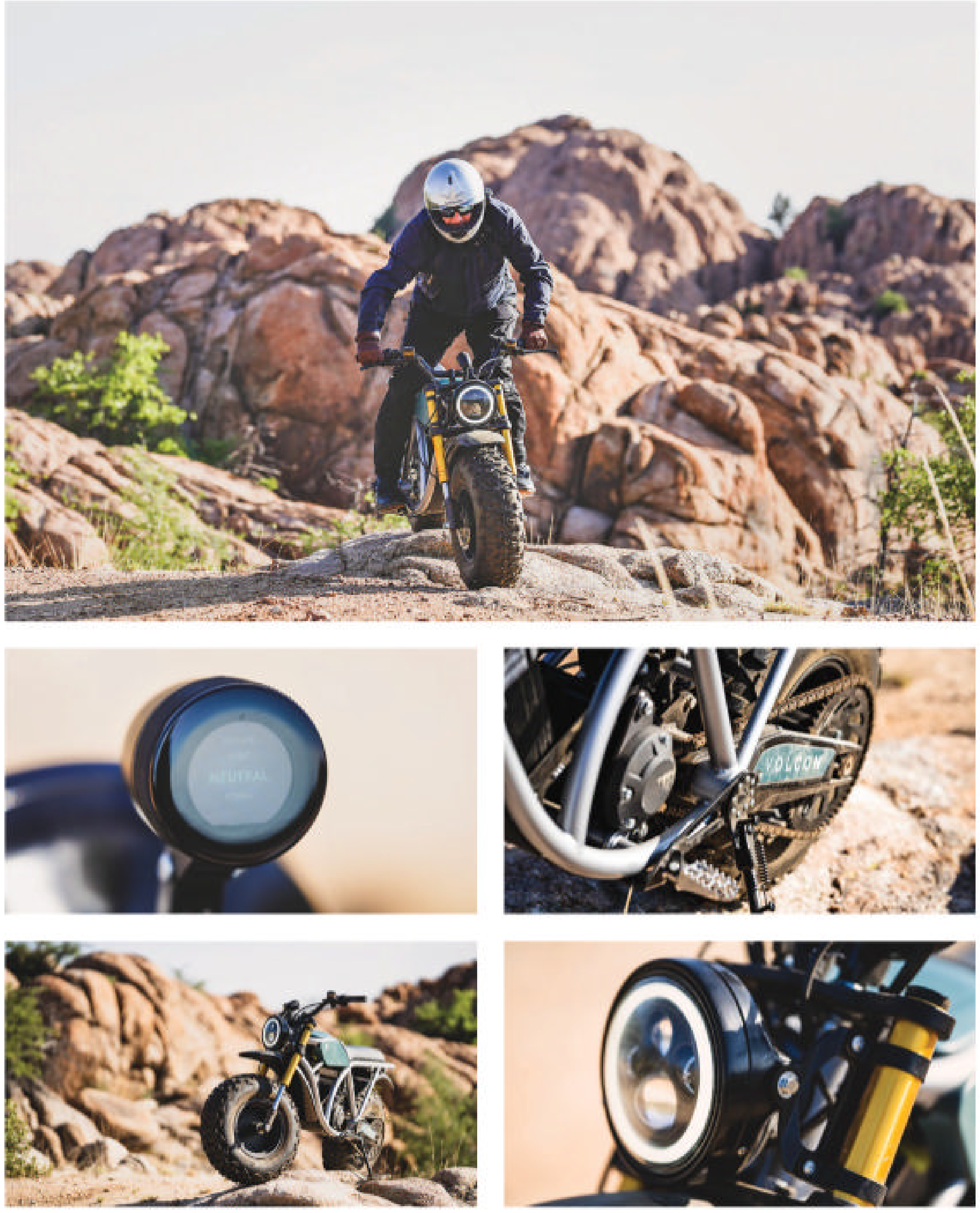
Additional mounting options include rack, rail, magnetic, and adhesive mounts, carabiners, and vehicle-specific rack mounts.

On detailed inspection, the MoonShade uses premium materials and assembly throughout. Carabiners secure the support poles to the awning so they can't pop out, and double stitching is utilized where needed. The fabric shade is constructed with 420D ripstop polyester (for nominal stretch) with a thick UV coating. The bottom of the material has a highly reflective coating that adds illumination to the shade along with thick polyester webbing trim.

In use, I have found the MoonShade to be easy to set up and deploy, taking only a few minutes longer than a traditional awning. I like that it is portable, as I can use it on three sides of the Scout Camper or move it to other vehicles, which I often do. It does hold up to Overland Expo force winds (grin) and Arizona monsoon rains, but more importantly, it works well for providing a lot of shade. This is partly due to the generous awning size but mostly to the adjustable support poles, which allow me to change the angle for more coverage.

Criticisms are minimal, the biggest being the metal-on-metal noise between the suction mount loops and the attachment carabiners. The company has since switched to rubber attachment loops for the suction cups. Because the MoonShade is sold direct, the unit is also a good value at under $400. Now, this awning in a bag goes everywhere I do.

$395 | MOONFAB.COM



2022 Volcon Grunt

An electric motorcycle ready for the trail, ranch, and even the Darién Gap.

The electric revolution has taken hold, with every segment of the transportation industry offering electrified solutions. From vans to boats, we are seeing rapid adoption of this proven technology, now delivered with the range and performance to meet the needs of discerning buyers. While the most remote overland expeditions are outside the scope of EVs (today), there are so many fun applications for their use while adventuring, including motorcycles. Enter the Volcon Grunt, a scrappy moto with balloon tires, reverse, 75 miles of range, and even 400 pounds of payload.

Riding the Grunt is a joy; the retro lines and comically huge tires bring a smile to the face and a steady flow of questions from onlookers. It feels powerful but somehow not dangerous, and I was even able to muster a wheelie with a little fork rebound. The bike looks intentionally austere, with only a small, round display to communicate all the technology within. The ride modes are accessed via a toggle pad and include stroll, explore, and sport. I used the stroll mode for days while cruising from booth to booth at Overland Expo, and it was ideal for safety and control in the crowds. Explore mode optimizes range while still giving good performance on the dirt. Lastly, sport mode unleashes maximum motor performance and a much more responsive throttle mapping.

The Volcon is ideal as a support vehicle for full-size overland trucks and expedition campers, working as a trail scout to check a route or to run into town for supplies.

On the dirt, the Grunt feels stable and tractable, with excellent grip from the front and rear 25- by 8-inch tires on 12-inch rims. This provides optimal flotation and deformation but can impart significant rebound during higher-speed impacts, knocking the rider off line. However, the Volcon is clearly designed for lower-speed forays, and the seat height of 32 inches allows for easily putting a foot down. The standard range is just over 35 miles, but the frame has the provision to carry an additional battery for hot swapping in the field. When combined with the strong regen performance, the Grunt will support hours of exploration.

Road riding is a bit more complicated, as the Grunt is listed "for offroad use only," but there are many states that permit licensing a motorcycle like this, requiring the addition of a horn and a few other modest modifications. The speed limit is listed as 40 mph, but we achieved that and more on mixed terrain. The Volcon is ideal as a support vehicle for full-size overland trucks and expedition campers, working as a trail scout to check a route, or to run into town for supplies. Curiously, the current distance between the two end road points in the Darién Gap is just inside the effective range of the Grunt—and those fat tires will float well in the Colombian mud.

$7,995 | VOLCON.COM

Clockwise from top: The Grunt is surprisingly nimble in technical terrain, with good balance and a low seat height. | The motor sits low and drives a robust chain to a large sprocket. | An excellent lighting package illuminates the trail for visibility and safety. | The big tires give extreme confidence on even the softest surfaces. | We appreciated the minimalist gauge cluster, which is controlled by a bar-mounted button array.

GIANT MOUSE

Knives Done Right.®

GIANTMOUSE.COM

4RUNNER
TOYOTA
California
7GRW822
SANTA CRUZ
HITCHFIRE

F-20

HITCHFIRE
LIFE AT THE HITCH™

HITCHFIRE.COM

THE LEDGE

TOYOTA
California
TEPUI
HITCHFIRE

Outdoor Research Women's SuperStrand LT Hoodie

A jacket that delivers on packability, fit, and comfort.

Photo by Richard Giordano

When it comes to jackets, choosing between down and synthetic can be a challenge. Often the choice in chilly but dry conditions, down is packable with a higher warmth-to-weight ratio, while synthetic is more water resistant and gentler on the pocketbook. While many brands successfully compromise by constructing a down and synthetic hybrid, Outdoor Research recently introduced their VerticalX SuperStrand synthetic fill, which arranges fibers in strands (versus sheets), resulting in more loft, compression, and a better warmth-to-weight ratio than the typical synthetic jacket. While attending overland rally events, camping with friends in the Canadian Rockies, and embarking on a multi-day backcountry hiking trip, I packed along Outdoor Research's SuperStrand LT Hoodie to determine if this rang true.

I noticed the packability of the jacket immediately. At 9.6 ounces, Outdoor Research states the SuperStrand LT Hoodie shrinks to the size of your palm. Indeed, I stuffed the hoodie into its left pocket, which proved helpful on my five-day trek where every inch of space was worth its weight in gold. Perhaps superficially, I didn't care for the light pewter color; fortunately, the jacket also comes in larch, moth, and black, and I admit the fit was very comfortable and flattering on my 5-foot-3-inch frame.

Outdoor Research succeeded in its quest for the ultimate lightweight synthetic jacket with a stellar warmth ratio—however, to truly achieve "four-season warmth" (at least, where I come from), the jacket should be used as a mid-layer and combined with a heavier puffy or shell. The 100 percent nylon 12D ripstop shell and lining feature a water-repellent coating meant for light moisture only—pack additional layers for the Pacific Northwest or other rainy locales. On warmer days, the interior nylon liner didn't feel great on bare skin (I would go with my Arcteryx Atom LT Hoody if wearing a tank or sleeveless top). But it felt wonderful with anything long-sleeved underneath and kept me comfortable on chilly evenings at camp or while descending the windy Nub Peak in Assiniboine Provincial Park.

> Outdoor Research introduced their VerticalX SuperStrand synthetic fill, which arranges fibers in strands (versus sheets), resulting in more loft, compression, and a better warmth-to-weight ratio than the typical synthetic jacket.

I experienced a bit of a snafu with the YKK zipper, which is tiny and incredibly light but perhaps not as robust as the YKK zippers on my other jackets. Fortunately, it is all sorted out now, but time will tell if this particular zipper lives up to YKK's bulletproof reputation in the outdoor gear space. But, overall, the SuperStrand LT Hoodie will remain in my wardrobe for several reasons. It offers a cozy warmth that's impressive considering the size, the fit is bang-on, and the piece acts like a down jacket in many ways, making it excellent for travel due to its light weight and ability to pack down small.

$219 | OUTDOORRESEARCH.COM

CREATE YOUR Adventure

30+ YEARS OF BUILDING & LIVING THE VAN LIFE

"CAMPER VANS DONE RIGHT"

5 unique conversion series with 4 high-end chassis brands.

FRESNO & RENO LOCATIONS • OVER 75 EMPLOYEES WITH A COMBINED 525 YEARS OF VAN BUILDING EXPERIENCE!

www.fieldvan.com
info@fieldvan.com

Field Van
CREATE YOUR ADVENTURE

@fieldvans
(559)233-8267

OVERLAND NEWS | TENA OVERACKER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SNOW PEAK

Living the Snow Peak Way

It's more than a lifestyle—it's a movement.

Takibi Time provided a nightly opportunity to gather around the fire for conversation and collaboration. | Master mixologist Jim Meehan showcases his craft. | Attendees strut their stuff with camp setups designed to dazzle.

Snow Peak is self-described as a gathering brand; its products are designed to facilitate an appreciation and connection with nature for the sake of it—nothing more.

Established as a climbing company in Japan in 1958 by Yukio Yamai, Snow Peak's evolution quickly moved to car camping products, followed by their entry into outdoor apparel. After a decline in car camping in Japan in the 1990s, Snow Peak Way was born as a way for the company to connect with customers, gathering feedback and inspiration from the people who mattered most. The event changed the company's direction, and a move was made to bypass wholesalers, reorganizing to direct supply, and Snow Peak flourished. Three generations have carried the Snow Peak flag in the Niigata Prefecture, and the business remains in the family today, continuing the commitment to craftsmanship begun by Yamai over 60 years ago.

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER Approximately 400 kindred spirits communed in September in Oregon's Tygh Valley alongside the White River. With a fitting nod to those that came before, Snow Peak Way's opening ceremony acknowledged the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and a deep appreciation for the land. Connections to time and place, geography, and culture are at the heart of both the company's products and the partners they choose to work with.

The sense of die-hard brand allegiance felt familiar, like that found in Toyota (Tacoma or Land Cruiser) or Land Rover owners. And similar to other overlanding events, smiles graced the visage of every attendee. The camaraderie was evident everywhere I looked, and I found myself drawn foremost to the people in attendance rather than the products that brought them together, though the two go hand in hand in creating the community.

The treasured pastime of tailgating is a concept Snow Peak embraces and was distinctly present at the event; it's relatable, encourages outdoor participation past the parking lot, and appeals to multiple generations. Structured activities or tasks are no longer required to find a larger connection to the outdoors, particularly with the

baja designs
LP6
BRONCO

LED AND LASER
LIGHTING SOLUTIONS

Available for all makes and models. No matter what you drive, Baja Designs has a state-of-the-art lighting solution that's years ahead of the competition.

Lifetime COMPLETE PURCHASE PROTECTION
uService REPLACEABLE LENSES AND OPTICS
ClearView™ MULTI-FORM OPTICS
MoistureBlock™ WATERPROOF, RAIN PROOF, SUBMERSIBLE
CopperDrive® SAFELY DRIVING LEDS AT 100%
Daylight LESS DRIVER FATIGUE, NATURAL COLOR

THE SCIENTISTS OF LIGHTING | BAJADESIGNS.COM | 800-422-5292

younger set. It's gathering for the sake of it, for the enjoyment of it, for the togetherness factor.

Each camp grouping had its own feel, and each setup was unique, akin to how every overlanding rig reflects its owner. A pocket of overlanders here, a cluster of vanlifers there, Subarus everywhere—with car campers being the majority. It's an event to see and be seen, but without pretension or ego. There is a tangible excitement that permeates the air, and it was clear people were just happy to be present.

NIGHT TIME IS THE RIGHT TIME Takibi Time is not to be missed at Snow Peak Way, when old and young bundle up and curl around fire pits in the crisp fall temperatures. Laughter and chit-chat were as plentiful as the shooting stars above, and the resounding conclusion I reached was that connecting to others is as important as connecting to self. Facilitating those exchanges is key and is as simple as lighting the fire.

REVERED GEAR I put loads of items through their paces at Snow Peak Way, but these are some of my favorites.

SNOWPEAK.COM

AMENITY 2-PERSON TENT | $300

The Amenity is the best-selling item of the brand and comes in three sizes (small/2-person, medium/4 person, and large/6 person). My home away from home for the weekend served me well, with an inviting vestibule that converts into an awning on the fly or provides side-door access when closed. It was perfect for me and my gear, though the vestibule would come in handy as a holding place when sheltering two occupants—without it, I think space would be a little tight. The two-person version is 46.8 inches tall, typical for this size tent. It weighs in at 10 pounds and provides an excellent option for car camping, with the promise of a quick setup due to color-coded poles. With a minimum water pressure resistance of 18,000 mm, the Amenity is suitable for use in heavy rain and wet snow, and its waterproof rainfly and floor should keep you dry as toast. The ivory color maintains the Snow Peak aesthetic in a soothing tone designed to not detract from the nature around you.

RENEWED SINGLE ACTION TABLE, MEDIUM | $380

The Single Action table's versatility is paramount, and the solid laminated bamboo surface is a thing of beauty—elegance and function melding together in the best of two worlds. Our group picnicked with them on the banks of the Deschutes, and someone commented that it looked like someone was fixing to propose—the perfect presentation with these tables being the core of the display. We also watched expert mixologist and winner of the James Beard Award, Jim Meehan, sling masterful creations such as Toki Bout it Punch in style behind several of these tables during his workshops and happy hours. Covered in soda water and various tints when used for the tie-dye workstation hosted by Shibori, one had to wonder if the tables would recover, but clean-up was always a cinch. The Single Action's ample work surface (36 x 28 inches) stands on top of sturdy aluminum legs. At home no matter where you take it, you'll find you take it everywhere. It's slightly heavy for me to tote at 22 pounds, but I'm willing to manage the workaround.

FOLDING CHAIR |

$170/GRAY, $120/RED

I have a pair of the red polyester version at home that has seen several years of use with only minor fading but became smitten by the gray canvas models I tried out at Snow Peak Way. The fabric had a higher comfort level, real or perceived, likely driven by my preference for more natural materials. The chairs weigh under 8 pounds and quickly fold flat for easy carry and transport. The aluminum tubing and cast zinc joints round out the quality construction, and the fabric is sturdy and made to last. The 18-inch sitting height accommodates most frames well, and the comfort factor is such that one of our hostesses relayed that she uses it as the sole desk chair in her office. These chairs pair perfectly with the Single Action Table but are ideal for any time you need to take a load off.

CAMPFIELD FUTON STARTER SET | $900

Although we did not have a Campfield at our setup, I took the time to admire it at another campsite. Not only does the Campfield look like it should be in a living room, it also brings the living room to your outdoor gathering, practically begging you to have a seat and start a conversation. Its modular components come with three convertible methods of use: it resembles a settee in its upright futon position, can be used as a two-chair configuration with an accent table, or opt for the three stacking shelves when storage takes priority. Its adaptability, tool-free setup, adjustable back, and included cushions are just some of the features to love. It's 38 pounds total, and if you have room and weight to spare in your vehicle, this is the item I would not leave home without.

LOW BEACH CHAIR | $170

These canvas chairs bring an easygoing vibe to any outdoor setting, and we practically lived in them when we weren't gallivanting from workshop to workshop around camp. Don't let their unpretentiousness fool you, though—they're meant to withstand the abuses of the elements and wear well with time. Natural wood armrests are featured on many Snow Peak chairs but seem to suit the Low Beach model particularly well. The sitting height is 12 inches on both this model and the Luxury Low, but the back is 7 inches taller on the regular Low for extra support. The aluminum alloy frame keeps things light with an 8-pound weight, and the chair folds down to fit in a durable carrying case.

TAKIBI TARP HEXA SET M | $550

The Hexa Set operated as the meeting place at our base camp, providing welcome shade during the day, fostering conversation and laughter under its wings. With the addition of string lights at night, the space transformed into a festive and cozy atmosphere, despite the absence of a campfire. With fire restrictions in place, we were unable to test the flame-resistant inner roof made of Aramid, a kissing cousin to Kevlar, but the idea of not having to worry about sparks under an awning is certainly appealing. The exterior tarp is waterproof and treated with a PU coating and Teflon. Solid construction and an appealing aesthetic make this a win-win for any campsite.

EXTENSION IRON GRILL TABLE (IGT) | $390

Also adorning our base camp was the IGT, a two-unit expandable grill table whose metamorphosis from coffee table to grill station is nothing short of magical. No tools or extension pieces are required in its flawless design, and it can be used with the Double Burner stove or two Flat Burner stoves. Simply slide open or closed, depending upon whether you are in entertaining mode or cooking for a crew—or both. The surface is again laminated bamboo (as with many Snow Peak tables), supported by an aluminum alloy stand. This chic setup is 24 pounds solid and folds compactly after use.

SS SINGLE SLEEPING BAG | $60

Designed in Japan, this attractive 4-pound sleeping bag in gray-flecked polyester is a basic staple best suited for the spring and summer seasons. It has a 41-degree rating and kept me warm when temps dipped into the 40s at night. Zip it to another to allow for a two-person bag, and use it as a chair cushion when folded and stored in its 19- by 15-inch stuff sack—an atypical feature that sets it apart from its counterparts.

TAKIBI FIRE AND GRILL | $350

The Takibi fire pits were outfitted with lava rocks and gas fuel to observe Oregon's fire restrictions but still allow for s'more fun and conversation around the fire on chilly nights. We also collected around the grill at Son of Man, a cider company using traditional Basque methods, as owner Jasper Smith cooked up a feast fit for the Kingdon of Navarre. The stainless steel is collapsible and easily portable (though the set does weigh 32 pounds) with its carrying case and should last you a good way toward forever.

TAKE RENEWED BAMBOO CHAIR | $190, $230/LONG

The Japanese-designed Take chairs hovered around the Takibi fire pits like moths to the flame, flitting from pit to pit as groups waxed and waned. This chair is as uncomplicated as they come, quickly unfolding for instant seating pleasure. The bamboo legs with aluminum supports are stylishly simple, and the canvas seat lightly folds around your body for cocoon-like comfort.

TI-DOUBLE 450 MUG | $55

In a process perfected by Japanese metalworkers in Yamai's hometown of Tsubame-Sanjo, Snow Peak's titanium products are both durable and ultralight, as well as flavor neutral. I used my mug often, moving from tea to an Old Fashioned to a few divine sips of Kubota Seppou Snow Peak White sake within the space of a few hours in a seamless transition devoid of residual aftertaste. The double-wall insulation does its job well, keeping up to 15 ounces of your favorite beverage at its perfect (or starting) temperature. The mug handles can be flipped out or left tucked in for ideal two-handed cocoa or tea blowing.

TITANIUM FORK AND SPOON SET W/CASE | $27

The brand's titanium line includes tableware of all kinds, right down to flasks and sake bottles, plates and bowls, and chopsticks. My silverware set was put to good use at Snow Peak Way, kept in a back pocket at the ready for what seemed like constant use, or hooked in my bag for easy access. The separately sold spork also saw plenty of action, and all withstood the rigors of camp life without a scratch.

HARD ROCK COOLER | $600/40-QUART, $696/75-QUART

As mentioned, there was no shortage of food and drink to be had at our camp HQ, and the Hard Rocks in tow held it all. Designed and made in the USA in conjunction with Grizzly Coolers, this certified bear-resistant cold box is built to last. Offered in 40-quart and 75-quart capacities with pressure-injected insulation and RotoTough Molded construction, it has a 2-inch drain plug for expedient emptying. The ice lasted four days straight with very little melt, and I am confident it could have kept things cold for far longer.

THE POWER

Mobile living made easy.

TO PLAY
TO ADVENTURE
TO GET OUT & STAY OUT
DOMETIC
CFX

MORE POWER TO YOU

DOMETIC
CFX

Dometic Powered Cooler System

Desert basecamps, high-country layovers, and endless road trips—nothing is out-of-bounds with the Powered Cooler System from Dometic. A rugged, no-ice-needed CFX3 powered cooler full of chilly drinks and fresh food, or even frozen treats. The portable, power-flexible PLB40 lithium battery. Ultra-low profile, deploy-anywhere OBSIDIAN® SERIES solar panels. All designed to work together in an intuitive, mobile package.

Use code OVERLANDJOURNAL for 10% off on dometic.com, exp 12/22.

Connect with us via @dometic

DOMETIC
OUTDOOR

fuel
fuel
KL 07
BW2130

The Lost Tusk

India burns a place in your heart, beckoning you back with each beat.

By Joe Fleming

I CAN STILL HEAR THE SOUNDS OF THE CONSTANT TRAFFIC—the smells of fuel, burning trash, and incense omnipresent. The smiles of the people we rode past are burned in my memory, as vivid as the colors of Kerala, which I've thought about every day since my return.

India was one of those places I didn't see coming, in the sense that I didn't know back then the lingering impact it would have on me, even as I write this.

The adventure started with a phone call from a friend in Spain who reached out asking if I had ever thought of completing excursions with my business, BonaFide Moto Company, into other countries other than our home base of South Africa. Perhaps, India? The thing is that I didn't have any knowledge or previous experience of India, but he did. It didn't take long for the mission to unfold, the artwork of the adventure to be created, a theme to manifest, the foundation laid for a general route, and flights to be booked. We were headed to the southern state of Kerala, locally known as God's own country, for a seven-day escapade. The name I gave it, the Lost Tusk, is a reference to the Hindu god Ganesha's tusk being chopped off by an axe. Ganesha is believed to clear obstacles and pave the way forward in life; thus, the journey was to be a quest to find oneself.

Kerala appealed to me a great deal since I had never heard of it before. When motorcycles and India are in the same sentence, the Himalayas are sure to follow. Kerala, in comparison, was masked in a mysterious veil. When I learned of the luscious greenery of the area's tea regions, dense jungles, beautiful beaches, and friendly people, it was all systems go.

The bikes we used were Royal Enfield Bullets. Due to my height of 6'7", friends warned me that I probably wouldn't even fit on one of them. They weren't entirely wrong. When it came to sharp turns, I had to maneuver around my knees quite a bit, but I loved the bike's simplicity and "bulletproof" nature—its eponymous quality was not lost on me.

We try to limit the unknown, and accommodation and restaurants along the way are usually pre-planned and booked. But what I came to love so much about the Lost Tusk was the spontaneity it encouraged; we only had two lodging places pre-booked, and the rest we ended up securing on a last-minute basis, dependent on when and where we were arriving.

As we headed to the promise of a roof over our heads near Munnar, a two-hour detour through private tea garden roads rewarded us with a point of no return. Our route showed we were two kilometers from our destination, but the road ahead was blocked. We had no choice but to backtrack an hour or so and devise an alternative plan for where we'd stay. As the sun went down, we asked for advice from some locals who directed us to rooms at Top Station.

Upon arrival, I let my ego crowd my judgment and thought we were insane to consider staying at what seemed to be sub-par accommodations. But after a look around the place, I realized it would work just fine. Something clicked in me that evening at Top Station. I learned the value of allowing your plans to change and leaning into that feeling of the unknown. That night was one of my favorites as we chatted with the locals around a fire, shared their food, and stayed up later than we should have. From that point on, the trip was all about detours, diverting from our planned routes, and opting for the roads less traveled. There were so many options, and none of them were wrong. That's India, though, and the beauty that comes along with it.

I feel like I left a part of me in India, or maybe India left a part of it in me. Perhaps that's why I think of it every day. With fluctuating travel and border restrictions these past few years, it's been difficult not being able to go back when I wanted to, but I've come to learn that India will always be there. And when the time comes, I'll be ready.

FUEL
MOTOR
CYCLES

LOCAL FISHERMEN AT THIKKODI BEACH WATCHED US MAP OUT OUR ROUTE FOR THE DAY **ON A SWELTERING, HUMID MORNING THAT WOULD ONLY INCREASE IN INTENSITY AS THE DAY WORE ON.**

(OPENING SPREAD)
OUR GUIDE JUMPED IN HIS MAHINDRA, **WAVING AT US TO FOLLOW HIM INTO THE JUNGLE** AS THE SUN SET OVER KERALA.

OUR TRUSTY ROYAL ENFIELD BULLETS COULDN'T COMPETE WITH WHAT THE JUNGLE HAD IN STORE FOR US, AND **WE FOUND OURSELVES DEFEATED TIME AND AGAIN.**

(OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT)

AFTER OUR UNSUCCESSFUL PUSH THROUGH THE JUNGLE'S TOUGH TERRAIN, OUR GRACIOUS HOST PICKED US UP IN HIS MAHINDRA, RETURNING US TO OUR BIKES THE FOLLOWING MORNING.

THE VIVID COLORS OF INDIA ARE A LOVELY FEAST OF IMAGERY FOR THE EYES. ALONG THE CANAL, WE WERE WELCOMED BY A LINE OF FESTIVE VILLAGERS.

LOCALS WERE ALWAYS CURIOUS ABOUT US AND OUR DOINGS. WHENEVER WE STOPPED TO LOOK FOR DETOURS, IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO ENGAGE WITH THEM AND PERHAPS LEARN A BIT MORE THAN WHICH WAY TO GO.

THERE WAS A BEAUTIFUL CHAOS THAT SOMEHOW SEEMED TO FLOW NO MATTER WHERE WE WENT WITH THE CROWDS. EVERY INCH OF THIS FERRY WAS PACKED WITH CARS, SCOOTERS, AND PEOPLE STANDING IN LINE TO HEAD INTO FORT KOCHI.

ISIDORO AND UGO HAVE A LOOK AT THE DAY'S ROUTE **WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE BIKES TO GET PACKED UP.**

INDIA IS CONSTANTLY ON THE MOVE AND ONLY SLOWS DOWN AT NIGHT. EACH TOWN PRESENTED A SENSORY OVERLOAD THAT REQUIRED DECIPHERING AS WE NAVIGATED OUR WAY ABOUT, SURROUNDED BY A BARRAGE OF HORNS, SCOOTERS, SMELLS, AND RAPIDLY MOVING OBJECTS.

★DYFI★

ROYAL ENFIELD

(OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)
CUTTING THROUGH THE JUNGLE TO A SECRET BEACH LOCATION, **WE CAME ACROSS A VERY NARROW BRIDGE THAT PRESENTED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES.** BEFORE LONG, VILLAGERS APPEARED, OFFERING THEIR ASSISTANCE.

A GROUP HUDDLES AROUND A FRESH CATCH OF SMALL FISH FROM THE SEA, **BIDDING TO SEE WHO WILL TAKE THE BOUNTY HOME.**

OUR HOUSEBOAT STOPPED ALONG THE CANAL JUST BEFORE SUNDOWN, WHERE **WE TRIED OUR LUCK AT MARKET, HAGGLING ON THE PRICE OF A FRESH FISH DINNER.**

OUR DETOURS TO THE BEACH ROAD PANNED OUT JUST FINE, AND WE EVENTUALLY **FOUND OURSELVES WEAVING IN AND AROUND THE DANCING PALM TREES ADJACENT TO THE WATER.**

THE LARGE PALM TREES AND LUSCIOUS RICE PADDIES OF KERALA **CAMOUFLAGED US IN THEIR GLORY.**

WE ALL RUN OUT OF FUEL AT SOME POINT. **ZUBIN FOUND HIMSELF ON EMPTY AMONGST A TEA PLANTATION** AND WAITED FOR A BACKUP RESERVE TANK TO ARRIVE.

WALKING AROUND LATE INTO THE NIGHT ON THE STREETS OF KOCHI **BROUGHT A WHOLE DIFFERENT LOOK TO INDIA.**

THE SMALL TOWN OF MUNNAR IS A VERY VIBEY PLACE, **WHERE VISITORS ARE SEAMLESSLY SUCKED INTO THE ACTION.**

(OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT) **THE PUSH INTO THE JUNGLE WAS ARDUOUS** BUT TEMPERED BY THE LOCALS SHOWING US THE WAY TO CAMP.

EVEN THE FINEST OLD BIKES ARE BOUND TO GIVE YOU PROBLEMS EVENTUALLY; ISI DOES HIS BEST HERE TO GET ROLLING AGAIN AS WE MAKE THE PUSH SOUTH FROM CHERAI BEACH.

ZUBIN AND HIS ENFIELD RECEIVE A NICE MORNING BOOST TO GET THE ENGINE TURNED OVER.

OUR HOST IN THE JUNGLE **SWOOPED IN WITH HIS MAHINDRA CHARIOT,** DECKED OUT IN CASUAL WEAR AND AN ATTITUDE TO MATCH.

A WILD CROWD OF WORKERS PARTAKE IN A VOLLEYBALL-TYPE GAME AT A TEA PLANTATION.

TOPPING UP THE FUEL TO HOPEFULLY **GIVE US ENOUGH JUICE TO GET TO THE NEXT TOWN.**

LEANING IN ON THE CURVE WITH SOME BICYCLE RIDERS ON OUR WAY TO THE BEACH JUST NORTH OF KOCHI.

WHETHER HERE...
ROCKER

OR THERE...
ROCKER

GCI GEAR IS ENGINEERED FOR LIFE OUTDOORS

#gcioutdoor

www.gcioutdoor.com

GCI OUTDOOR™

THE ALL NEW
ROADIAN ATX
NEXEN
ROADIAN ATX
ROADIAN ATX

ROADIAN ATX

All Terrain

Meet the all-new Nexen Roadian ATX; the most versatile all-terrain tire available. Off-road capability and road manners come standard. The 3-ply sidewall adds durability even under heavy loads, and the 3PMSF-certified tread tackles severe weather. The ATX is equipped with everything to handle your next overland adventure and all roads in between.

UP TO 65K MILE TREADWEAR WARRANTY

3 PEAK MOUNTAIN SNOWFLAKE CERTIFIED

SCAN HERE FOR INFO

NEXEN TIRE
we got you

NexenTireUSA.com

Pull Your Weight

Find out which of these five leading synthetic-rope winches carried the most weight in overall performance.

By Sean Gorman
Photography by Paula Burr
and Scott Brady

MAXTRAX

RECOVERY SYSTEM

MODERN, SIMPLE,
SAFE RECOVERY GEAR

MAXTRAX Recovery Kit Bag

A heavy duty weather resistant carry bag to store your recovery gear

MAXTRAX Fuse Shackle

Designed to be the controlled failure point if the system is overloaded

MAXTRAX Core Shackle

Designed to connect two interacting MAXTRAX products

MAXTRAX Kinetic Rope

Produces 30% elongation and provides a smoother, safer recovery

MAXTRAX Static Winch Rope

A safe alternative to cables and ropes with metal components

MAXTRAX Static Rope

Can be used as a load sharing bridle, tree trunk protector or extension rope

MAXTRAX Hitch 50

Tow hitch designed exclusively for use with soft shackles

MAXTRAX Winch Ring 120

Lightweight snatch block alternative. Use with soft shackles and synthetic rope

MAXTRAX Rope Dampener

Hang over recovery rope to absorb force in the unlikely case of breakage

SHOP ONLINE AT MAXTRAXUS.COM

The year 2009 was memorable for many reasons: US Airways Flight 1549 hit a large flock of geese shortly after takeoff and successfully landed in the Hudson River, the swine flu ravaged the world, and *Overland Journal* printed their 12-volt winch review in the Gear Guide. A lot has changed in winch technology in 13 years, but some things have stayed the same.

Some people argue that a winch is an antiquated tool. Vehicles today are more capable than ever, with traction control systems, improved tire technology, and the addition of aids such as traction boards. It is true that 90 percent of the winch recoveries I have ever done were to pull someone else out of a predicament they found themselves in. But that means that the other 10 percent was spent pulling myself out. I'd argue that anyone traveling in a solo vehicle should see a winch as mandatory. And yes, a winch can even be used in the desert without a tree in sight.

Over the course of a month, we tested five 12-volt winches. We broke three winch ropes and had to call off testing a few times due to some interesting finds (more to come on this). The intention of the testing was never to break anything or to see if we could push equipment past its published ratings. Instead, the goal was to explore data and impressions along with real-world functionality to empower the potential buyer.

Winches require special training, and there is always more to know and learn. What you read and see in this article is not always proper or correct usage. The point was to test the winches in a way that pushed them to their edges of capability, to know what performs best when it needs to work. When you find yourself alone in the desert, and your winch is your only tool to get out, product failure is unacceptable.

TESTING AND **CONSIDERATIONS**

If you're thinking of buying a winch, my advice is to research and buy the best you can afford. This item has a lot asked of it and is best described as a safety device, much like a first aid kit. The winch lives on the front of a vehicle, getting covered in mud, snow, salt, and rain; it's mounted inches from the radiator, getting heat-soaked and cold-cycled daily. We often don't unspool it for years and then ask it to perform flawlessly when the going gets tough. It likely is one of the most mistreated items you'll ever put on your vehicle.

As important as the winch is the mounting system, as illustrated during our testing. The factory winch mount on the Jeep wasn't up for the task of pulling to stall and was a contributing factor in some of the winch ropes breaking. I'm a fan of using winch mount systems from winch manufacturers because you know the system has been tested together. Other mounting systems, such as ARB, go through failure mode effects analysis or FMEA durability testing, which is costly but gives a buyer confidence. Many companies have never performed any real analysis of their product other than some personal testing or product placements to see if they failed or not. Unfortunately, when it comes to load factors and safe use, a pass/fail grade is inadequate and something you shouldn't be subjected to as a buyer.

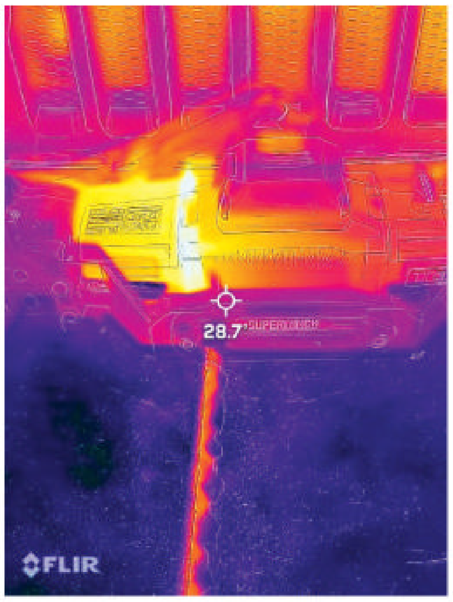
Adding a winch to your vehicle does add some complexity. You'll need a lot more than just the winch itself, and the additional items needed will likely require more investment than the winch. You'll need a good mount, suspension that can compensate for the additional weight of the mount and winch, and possibly a charging system upgrade or dual battery system to handle the electrical load, or at the very least, a basic winch kit. You might consider upgrading the winch rope, hook, and fairlead as well. Look at the winch as a system, and design yours for what you need—it's not the time to cut corners.

TIP

The most important accompaniment to the winch is proper training in its use.

The most important accompaniment to the winch is proper training in its use. Think of winch training as two separate parts: First, obtain fundamental training on operation and the dos and don'ts of handling the winch and its parts; it will require a few hours of hands-on instruction. Your instructor will explain the pinch points (literally, in this case) and how to correctly spool, field wrap, and care for the winch and its accessories. Second, you'll want to learn how to safely use the winch to extract yourself or someone else. The sky is the limit on how advanced you can get with a winch pull. Start by performing a single and double line pull with an instructor's supervision to understand the physics at play during the recovery. You'll become versed in minimum breaking

Here, we are just starting to tension the winch line. This is not a good place to stand once the line becomes loaded. | **Opening page:** Getting everything rigged correctly is an important part of safe winching.



HEAT OF THE MOMENT
Looking at the Superwinch with a thermal camera, you can clearly see the motor heat, but the highest heat is from the winch's braking system. This picture was taken while lowering the vehicle using the winch. Also note the heat from the winch rope itself; this is residual heat transferred from the drum.

strengths (MBS) and working load limits (WLL) and why you need to know what you're working with.

CHOICES AND **SELECTIONS**

The electric winch industry has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 20 years. In the 1960s and 1970s, it wasn't uncommon to see power take-off (PTO), engine-driven winches with complex power transfer systems, hydraulic winches that used additional pumps or your power steering pump to operate, or even engine-driven capstan winches that used large ropes and two people to get unstuck. All of these options have certain advantages, but the electric winch makes the most sense for overland use. The ease of fitment to multiple vehicles and the reliability of the electric winch have made it king in the world of recovery.

One of the reasons electric winches work so well is that our modern electrical systems are designed for high output. It wasn't uncommon in the 1960s for many carbureted vehicles to have generators or alternators that only used 40 amps or less. Your vehicle's batteries are much more reliable and capable of handling extreme amperage loads and can still recover and charge. Nowadays, it's not uncommon for a charging system to exceed 150 amps and incorporate large batteries. Many overlanders install dual-battery systems, which ease the load on a single battery and can give you a backup option depending on how they are wired. If you use your winch often, you'll need to ensure your battery is still in good shape. Have a local shop run a conductance test before heading out to give you a better idea of the internal condition of the battery's cells.

The small form factor of most electric winches is a major advantage, as it will work for most vehicle fitments. Currently, it is common for winch mounts to make access to touching the winch or the drum nearly impossible. While I don't advocate for winch mounts that wouldn't allow a user to make corrections to the spool or even see the spool, I understand that it sometimes is the only way to make it fit. If I had a choice, though, I'd choose a mount where I could see and make corrections if need be. The ability to respool correctly and to prevent rope pinching is critical. I've seen winches get a rope pinch that was nearly impossible to fix and would have been even more difficult if I couldn't see the spool.

Another nice feature of the electric winch is the simplicity of the electrical hookup. A winch designed with an integrated control box often only requires routing the winch cable leads through a safe passage to the battery and connecting the positive and negative leads to the battery. Many winches also incorporate or offer a remote control box to be mounted separately from the winch itself. These installations allow more customizable mounting and access to the controls. One thing often overlooked is the ability to disconnect the winch from the electrical system in an emergency (see sidebar below).

For this test, we selected five electric winches in the 9,500- to 10,000-pound pulling range to be more applicable to most overland vehicles in use. As full-size trucks become more common, we may need to re-evaluate with a higher pulling weight test. A good rule of thumb is to have a winch rated to 1.5 times your gross vehicle weight as loaded for travel. So weighing your vehicle to determine an appropriate winch size is critical; don't forget to add the weight of the bumper and winch when deciding.

The winches were fitted with synthetic rope and tested as delivered by the manufacturer. We used the fairlead provided with the winch and weighed the winches as they would be installed. Winch hooks were tested initially, but after some ropes broke, we eliminated the hook from the test to decrease the system's weight and increase the safety level (hook notes and observations were taken). Installation instructions were followed, and torque settings on the hardware were observed.

Jeep provided a new Rubicon 392 and installed the factory Mopar winch plate (Mopar part# 82215182AC). The grill was removed for easier access to the winch and ease of installation. The outer shell (non-structural) of the factory modular bumper was also removed for access and to observe the winch during testing. We found two significant issues with this mount. While stall-testing the first two winches, we broke two winch ropes. Upon further inspection, we identified that the winch mount was flexing from 3/4 of an inch to over an inch under load. We observed that near stall, the body of the winch sometimes would make contact with the mount. We also found that the slot in the front of the mount for the rope to pass through and the

WINCH DISCONNECT
Any electric winch should have a way to disconnect power when it's not being used. In a front-end motor vehicle accident, the electrical wiring can easily short or get cut. If the winch is powered on, it can start an inadvertent operation or a fire. Worse yet, it could short-circuit and cause the battery to overheat and potentially explode. I recommend a high-power switch under the hood or a large fuse in the system. Either works well but should be considered a requirement of any winch installation.

fairlead to mount were small enough that the rope could touch the metal and expose it to abrasion and potentially a right angle or sharp edge while loaded. After experiencing these failures, we changed the mount to a Warn JL winch mounting tray, which alleviated the problems.

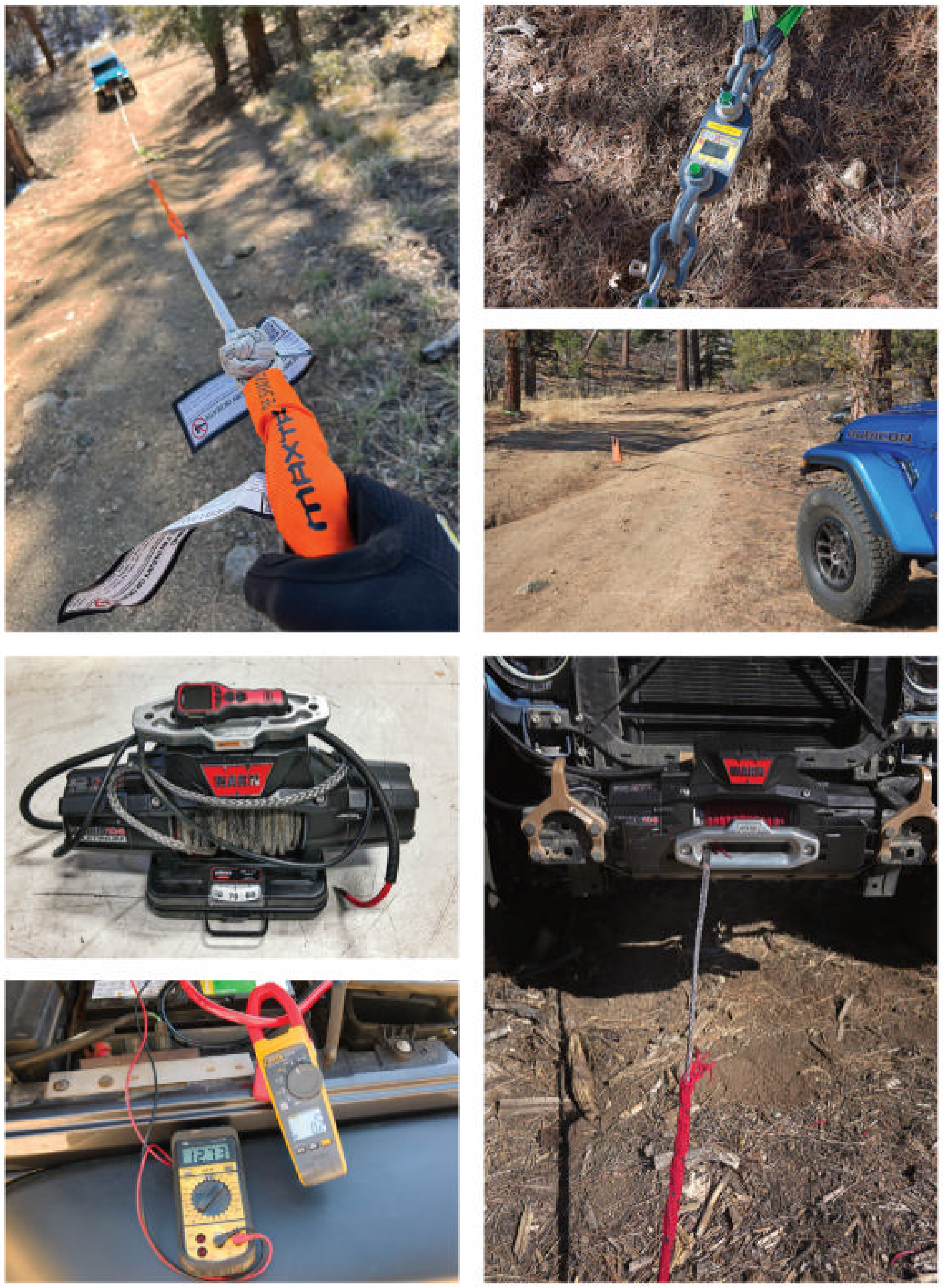
The winches were tested to verify their manufacturer's rated pulling power by strapping the rear of the Jeep to a tree using rated, static recovery equipment. The winch was then unspooled to the manufacturer's recommended number of minimum wraps remaining (2/3 drum, 10 wraps with synthetic line) and connected to a Dillon Edxtreme 25,000-pound strain gauge to measure the loaded pulling capacity. This gauge is used in the overhead lifting industry and is accurate to 0.1 percent with the capability to record the peak load. The purpose of the test is to see if the winch stall capability meets its rated capacity and to find out what the stall load capacity is. I consider this a pass/fail test that should be interpreted as nothing more than whether the winch is capable of the advertised weight. It should be noted that charging voltage, battery storage capacity, and voltage drop are contributing factors to the winch's capacity to stall, and peak performance is dependent on the vehicle being in perfect working condition. As such, anything within 3 percent would be considered inside that margin of error.

TIP

A good rule of thumb is to have a winch rated to 1.5 times your gross vehicle weight as loaded for travel. Don't forget to add the weight of the bumper and winch when deciding.

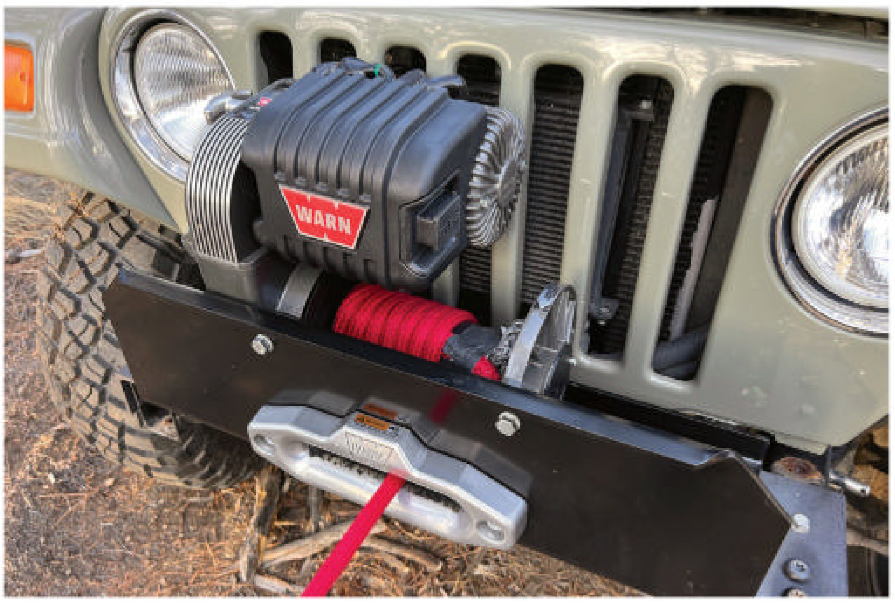
The second test should be described as a torture test and consisted of three consecutive 70-foot pulls from a 3-degree slope that increased to a 23-degree slope. The motor, gearbox, and drum temps were noted prior to pull, and the test was done without stopping while winching in. Once the vehicle reached the top of the incline, temperature measurements were retaken at the motor, gearbox, and drum. Amperage was recorded for the entire test, and max amperage was recorded. The vehicle was then lowered down the same incline, stopping three times to test the brake holding. Once the vehicle was lowered back to its starting location, the test was repeated for three cycles. This test is taxing on the winch and the charging system and pushes their limits. The flattest portion of the test at the bottom allows the winch to pull on its first layer and provide maximum pulling power, but by the time the winch has reached the last 10 feet, the winch is pulling on its fourth layer and is near stall to keep moving. This test replicates multiple pulls in the worst way possible.

Warn, ComeUp, Superwinch, Ironman, Smittybilt, Ramsey Winch, and Red Winches were all invited to be represented in this review. Smittybilt never replied, Ramsey committed to providing a Patriot 9.5 but never came through, and Red Winch declined to be involved due to their lack of network in the United States.



Clockwise from top left: Pulling the MaxTrax winch rope while utilizing a fuse shackle. | A calibrated strain gauge measures the pulling power of the winch. | Getting the winch ready to test required exact vehicle placement and distances. Note the winch rope weight in the center to help the rope fall if it breaks. | The red winch protective sheath was no match for the heat generated from the torture test. | Measuring the battery, charging voltage, and amperage of the winch during testing. | Weight measuring the winch as it would be mounted on a vehicle.

WARN | M8274



The Warn 8274 has a long history of dependability and reliability, participating in the Camel Trophy and numerous winching challenges worldwide. Introduced in 1974, it replaced the Belleview model that had been around since 1959 but is similar to the original model. The M8274 took the Editor's Choice Award in *Overland Journal*'s last face-off.

Design improvements since 2009 have increased capability and reliability. Warn changed the heat treating and coating on the spur gears, converted to a contactor solid state control system, and modified the motor to increase the rated pull power from 8,000 to 10,000 pounds. Minor but meaningful adjustments to waterproofness were made to lengthen the product's lifespan. Everything about this winch is premium, from fit and finish to the well-coated surfaces. The included attachment hardware is solid and properly sized.

PROS
- Amazing braking and predictability
- Historically proven
- Great support and repairability

CONS
- Hard to fit to current vehicles
- Extremely heavy
- Cost

The M8274 is the only foot-forward (front attachment to the mount versus the bottom) winch of the test and is well-suited to pulling; it's an uncommon configuration requiring a specially made bumper. We modified a Warn universal 8274 mounting plate with fabrication and brackets to work with the Jeep, an acceptable solution for testing purposes.

This model is the only non-planetary gear-type winch in the test, using spur gears in an oil bath with an external motor and an external disc braking system. Spur gears are strong and fast by design, and the M8274 operates at over 37 feet per minute unloaded. Having this much speed can be beneficial, but for most of us, it's too fast: slow and steady wins the race in vehicle recovery.

On the stall test, I stopped at a pulling capacity of 7,985 pounds to avoid a potential break when the mount started twisting. The winch was not struggling before terminating the test, and I am confident it would have met and likely exceeded the 10,000-pound rating.

The free spool worked well. The T-handle shape protruding from the side takes some effort to pull out, but once disengaged, the spool spins freely. The Spydura rope is a time-tested Warn product and functions as expected. The provided hook is not as high quality, and an upgraded Epic winch hook, or, even better, a Factor 55 thimble (Warn now owns Factor 55), would be a better match.

The controller is classic Warn style, with a robust cable and keyed connector, and the control box is integrated onto the winch body but can be remotely mounted with a Warn kit. Recent enhancements include an Albright contactor system, improved waterproofness on the control box, and refined rubber covers with enhanced grip and durability for the handheld control. An easy-to-read, in/out switch is manageable with gloves, and the simple diagram portraying switch function inhibits incorrect and dangerous usage.

The braking system is an often overlooked feature but an important one. It holds the vehicle's weight when the winch is stopped and allows you to lower the vehicle with the winch. The M8274 external disc brake is a very clever design, always moving while the motor is in operation, allowing for additional cooling.

$3,559 | WARN.COM

COMEUP | SEAL GEN2 9.5RSI

COMEUP WINCH
COMEUP

ComeUp has been exclusively making premium winches since 1975 and introduced its products to the US market in 2013. The family-owned-and-operated Taiwan-based company produces 75 percent of its components, including motors, allowing for quality control. For many years, ComeUp manufactured winches for Superwinch, but no longer.

The Seal Gen2 line is the second generation of winches to promise a waterproof product that works while submersed without issue. We did not test this claim, but a friend of mine has used it often in difficult situations for a few years now and attests it's the most reliable winch he's ever owned. While he's had to rebuild other-brand winches every few years due to water and corrosion, it's been unnecessary with his ComeUp. Publisher Scott Brady used ComeUp winches on the Expeditions 7 trip and said they never failed to deliver, even in extreme temperatures. He appreciates that the business solicits feedback to improve upon design and reliability.

PROS
Sealed from water and weather
Good customer support
Braking system keeps heat away from the drum

CONS
Provided rope didn't perform well
Wireless remote too small
Vehicle continued to roll back while stopping during lowering

The 9.5rsi provided to us has an integrated contactor control system. The installation manual's instructions were clear, and the hookup was straightforward, with a traditional bottom foot mounting system and good-quality hardware. The hook was robust but would not close around a standard bow shackle pin. The synthetic rope was well-marked with red paint for minimum useful length indication. We broke the rope on the winch approximately 10 inches from the fairlead. I requested a second rope from ComeUp, suspecting the flexing bumper caused the failure. After installing the replacement and retesting the winch to stall, a few strands broke nowhere near the fairlead, indicating rope quality could be improved. Final testing was completed using MaxTrax ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) winch line.

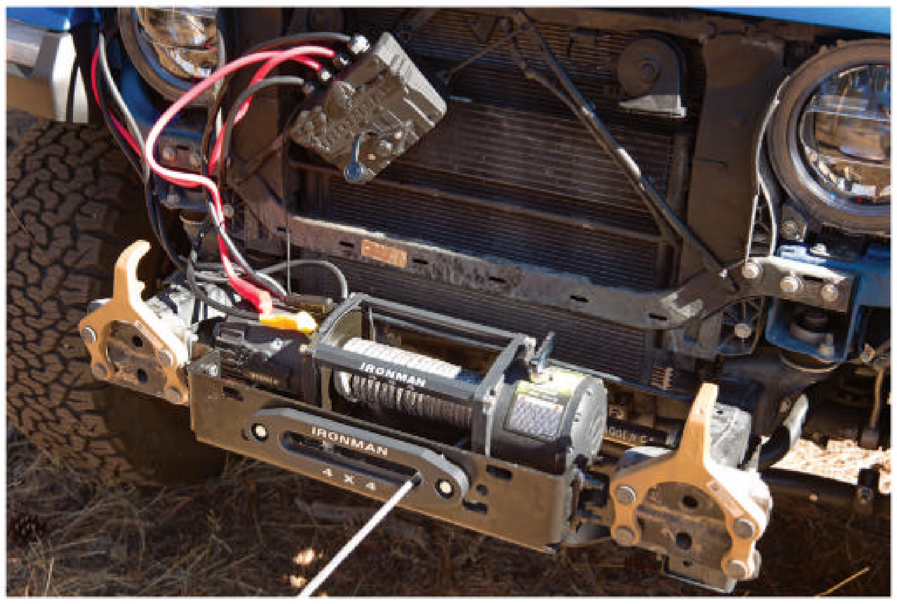
The exterior of the winch has a simple on/off switch that needs to be activated for operation, eliminating inadvertent actions and promoting safety. Once the button is pressed, external lighting displays the battery voltage, winch temperature, and flashing fault codes when applicable. The hand control is high quality with apparent detents, easily manipulated while wearing gloves, and the heavy-duty cord and connector should last a long time. The small remote wireless handset paired easily and worked perfectly during testing with no discernable delay during use, though storing it in a pocket could lead to accidental activation.

During testing, the 9.5rsi exceeded the maximum stall test with a 9,755-pound pulling capacity. The clutch handle never jammed in position and slid easily into free spool and an engaged setting, although it was extremely difficult to pull rope from—a smaller-statured person would struggle—and it did not loosen up. The additional pull effort required is distracting and could lead to poor decision-making.

Line speeds were more than adequate. When loaded, winch noise obviously increased, and while it didn't appear to struggle, the sound level indicated otherwise. ComeUp uses a patented cone braking system to keep the braking heat away from the drum, but the winch sounded like it was filled with gravel while lowering when hot, perhaps the result of heat soaking the gearbox from the brake system during lowering. The vehicle continued to roll backward 2-3 feet before stopping while lower, and a loud ratcheting noise ensued when trying to stop the vehicle while lowering, shaking my confidence.

$1,580 | COMEUPUSA.COM

IRONMAN | MONSTER 9500



Ironman products are renowned in Australia, where the company was founded, and their catalog of overland equipment from suspension to soft goods is extensive. They specialize in offering budget-conscious products that also perform well, and the Monster 9500 is a perfect example.

The design of the Monster 9500 hearkens back to the original Warn planetary winches of years past. It's a basic design with the gearbox on one end and the motor on the other, and the drum brake is internal to the drum. Everything is held together with small crossbar braces that prevent the two halves from separating. It was the only winch tested with an extended remote-mounted vent hose for the winch motor—a smart addition to help relieve water condensation and increase weatherproofness.

The control box is an externally mounted contactor system. Color-coded wiring makes hookup straightforward, but there is more wiring than an integrated winch. The advantages of a remote-mounted box are the ability to place it in a better location and that less mounting space is required on the bumper. Ironman makes two separate-sized control boxes for different fitments to allow the best mount for your situation. The remote control is intuitive and can be used with gloves. There is a small LED flashlight integrated into the remote. The remote can be used wirelessly with the addition of a small plug inserted into the control box. Ironman provided both control box sizes, so we received two controllers. We did notice that one remote switch felt sticky while operating (likely some plastic flashing in the remote from manufacturing), but after some use felt normal. Both flashlight lenses fell out of the remote during operation, but the flashlight still worked. The wireless operation of both remotes was tested and never worked.

PROS

- Cost
- Small form factor makes mounting easy
- Vented motor system

CONS

- Controller is flimsy and cheap feeling
- Wireless control system not operative
- Included hardware not well made

The free spool clutch was the smoothest of all the winches tested. I was impressed at how effortless the rope was to pull off the drum during use, and the rope hook worked well. The initial winch rope was cut from the Jeep's bumper deflecting, but Ironman provided a second rope. It did not arrive in time, so we finished testing using the MaxTrax UHMWPE rope, which performed flawlessly. There is a quality difference in the fit and finish of parts. The powder coating seems thin and chipped from the slightest impact, and the provided hardware was stamped and didn't exude confidence, but it should be noted that it did not fail.

During the use of the Monster 9500, the bumpers were more obviously struggling not to bend. The winch design made the system's flex readily apparent because the twist was severe, but the winch never seemed to struggle. It stalled slightly beyond its rating. Speed was moderate and completely adequate for regular operation.

During the torture testing, the internal drum brake heated up tremendously. The highest temperature of 219°F after the third lowering demonstrates the winch's inability to lose heat caused from braking. This heat could cause rope degradation if heavy braking is needed in real-world use (most people never lower a vehicle with their winches). The brake was consistent and predictable when stopping.

$699 | IRONMAN4X4AMERICA.COM

WARN | ZEON 10-S PLATINUM

OVERLAND JOURNAL
EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Warn Zeon 10-S Platinum is the flagship of the Zeon product line, designed to accommodate hidden winch designs and mounts with limited access. I prefer a winch that can be seen and handled manually to allow tending to the rope drum, but my bias does not extend to the winch itself. Warn's world-class customer service and proven history still set the benchmark all winches are judged against. Fit and finish is impeccable, and the drum design and hardware fitment are top-notch.

With an absent clutch release handle, the clutch is released via the completely wireless remote, activating an internal electric solenoid and, in turn, free spool function. There is no option to plug the controller directly into the winch itself. These two things alone may cause distrust in the product or bring into question reliability, but we did not find fault with either. The wireless remote can be used with gloves and is well-marked. It takes some practice knowing which buttons to use and becoming familiar with the pairing sequence at startup, but both become second nature. The color LED screen provides temperature and charging voltage indications. The remote can activate other remotely operated accessories, such as driving lights, and comes paired to the winch. But if need be, the re-pairing process is simple but requires pressing a button on the winch itself. The controller comes with a cigarette lighter to USB adapter and a heavy-duty, extra-long USB charging cable and can be plugged into the vehicle while operating outside the vehicle while the controller is being charged. The wireless remote range is impressive; I could control the winch from over 50 yards away without issue, and I still had more range.

PROS
- Voltage and temperature indications
- Can be mounted in hidden location
- Remote controls accessories, eliminating switches

CONS
- No physical clutch release
- Remote cannot plug directly into winch
- Large form factor requires more space

The Spydura rope is premium quality, but the hook isn't; the Warn Epic hook should be included at this price. The rope's red heat barrier indicates when the maximum length is reached, particularly important for hidden mounts. The aluminum fairlead is nicely radiused with good functionality. The rope attachment system to the drum is first-rate, and the finish of the drum surface is designed with just the right friction for the rope to pull well.

The winch body is larger due to the electrically operated clutch system and may be a tight fit for some installations. The hardware is high quality, and having the winch slots accept flanged locknuts is smart. The installation instructions were clear, and the product was simple to use.

During testing, the 10-S performed splendidly, doing everything asked of it without too much fuss. We did not hit the 10,000-pound stall rating during testing, as it stalled at 9,785 pounds, but you'll likely never use the winch near stall. Its loaded line speed was the slowest of the winches tested, but its unloaded line speed was quicker than most. Free spool difficulty was average, and most users will be able to pull the rope without difficulty. While lowering the vehicle down the hill, heat was adequately managed with the winch's braking system. Noise increased during braking and rose as the winch gained more heat.

$2,665 | WARN.COM

SUPERWINCH | SX10SR

OVERLAND JOURNAL VALUE AWARD

Superwinch was founded in 1972, producing winches for recreational and professional uses, and many will recognize the reliable Superwinch Husky found on Camel Trophy vehicles. The US Special Forces have also utilized Superwinch planetary models successfully. In 2019, Superwinch was purchased by Westin Automotive of San Dimas, California. After a rebranded and redesigned product lineup, the SX10SR came to market. Part of the engineering team's research for the new line included speaking with long-time users and industry professionals to find out what they wanted in a winch, and the results are clear in the SX series' design features.

The SX10's solid-state control system and box are die-cast aluminum, bolted onto the winch's main body. This clever design allows a buyer to relocate the winch control box remotely if the installation requires that. The box has a nicely sealed design with a rubber spring-loaded mechanism. The controller is uncomplicated in that it is labeled "In" and "Out," and the cable is very robust. The connector uses an easily replaceable metal connector with a distinct locking mechanism to the box, assuring good contact and eliminating accidental disconnection of the control cable. The winch comes with a wireless remote system that is easy to use and was a slightly smaller version of the cabled version. The LED flashlight in the controller is a handy addition for extra light during use.

PROS

Useful drum lighting
Metal cord connector locks in place
Low cost for a high-quality winch

CONS

Retained significant heat during braking
Ability to exceed stall rating could exceed some recovery equipment ratings

The rope held up well and appears to be of good quality. The fairlead had a large radius, and the rope hook is a cast version that seemed very strong and up for the task. One additional feature exclusive to the SX10 is an LED lighting system for the drum. This provides welcoming lighting for the rope drum and is something that I suspect will be emulated by others in the future.

The clutch release was simple to use, with a pull upward and a twist to free spool. The clutch worked perfectly and never jammed or failed to engage correctly. The free spool of the rope was easy to pull and would be suitable for almost any user.

During the testing, the winch performed flawlessly. During the stall test, I stopped pulling at 10,190 pounds, and the winch still had more to give, likely another 500-1,000 pounds. The solid housing and gusseted design made the winch very sturdy during use. Its painted coating seems thick and meant to withstand the test of time. Where some other winches tested had visible flex or twist in the body, the Superwinch had none. The heavy-duty body did exhibit a lot of heat retention when in operation, which could become problematic during strenuous use. The mechanical brake performed admirably while lowering the vehicle, and stopped the vehicle reliably. Line speed was average and provided a reasonable and safe rate while operating.

$764 | SUPERWINCH.COM

CONCLUSIONS

After spending weeks of testing and countless hours pushing the winches to their limits, it's clear that winches are better now than they were 15 years ago. The industry has managed to produce products that deliver when needed, and there are far more offerings today. Any of the winches tested would be suitable for most people's needs, and the spectrum of price points makes winches more accessible than ever.

EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD The Warn Zeon 10-S Platinum takes the award, but my choice deserves some additional explanation. Most winch mounting systems are bottom or foot-forward with a 4.5 x 10-inch bolt pattern. It's become an industry-wide standard and will be the pattern you'll most likely be shopping for. The 10-S is also available in a corded version with a manual clutch lever, which costs less and is a good option for people with access to their winch. The 10-S Platinum, as tested, will work on nearly every mounting configuration, including hidden mounts, giving it unparalleled versatility.

In my work with Land Rover, the 10-S Platinum was tested and chosen as the factory installation for the Defender. During the testing of different winch installations, Warn was chosen primarily due to its ability to be mounted behind the front passenger protection systems. This meant that the vehicle passed the same crash tests with and without a winch and passed to the same levels. It, therefore, does not require the blanket statement seen on most off-pavement equipment, for "off-road use only." We've since installed a few hundred 10-S Platinums on the Land Rover Trek competition vehicles and have only had a couple of minor problems that ultimately were tracked down as installation issues. I've personally had at least 100 pulls with the winches in real-world use and have never had a single issue from the winch or the wireless remote system.

VALUE AWARD The Superwinch SX10SR won the Value Award, hands down. Performance was excellent, and features such as the drum light and the option to mount the control box remotely are fantastic additions. It was evident that Westin Automotive took their time and designed something based on function, but they did a great job with the form, too. Its price point is extremely fair, and despite the new ownership and design, the warranty shows the company's faith in its product.

TAKEAWAYS

The winch's ability to stall is often higher than its rating and presents a real ability to exceed your recovery equipment. The safety factor may be less than you think.

Variables in winch rope quality and size ratings became apparent during testing. Two different 3/8-inch ropes had different diameters and disparities in flexibility. The hidden star of the entire test was the MaxTrax static winch rope. It performed flawlessly on the same mountings that cut other ropes and survived testing on multiple installations and winches. It's a pre-stressed rope with a protective layer wound around it. Although it's designed for soft shackle use, it proved to work well on hard shackles, too.

Thermal imaging showed the level of heat and friction from an aluminum hawse fairlead with the rope, leaving no doubt that the rope degrades from the friction. A larger radius fairlead at severe angles helps spread the load over a greater surface area, but the increased surface area increases the friction. The downside to a smaller radius is that it causes the rope strands to bend and ultimately break. Roller fairleads provide the best use but stick out from the bumper and are far heavier. HawsePro recently released a low-profile roller fairlead that has shown to be a good compromise. It allows the advantages of the roller fairlead and has a large radius roller, yet it is small and doesn't protrude from the bumper excessively.

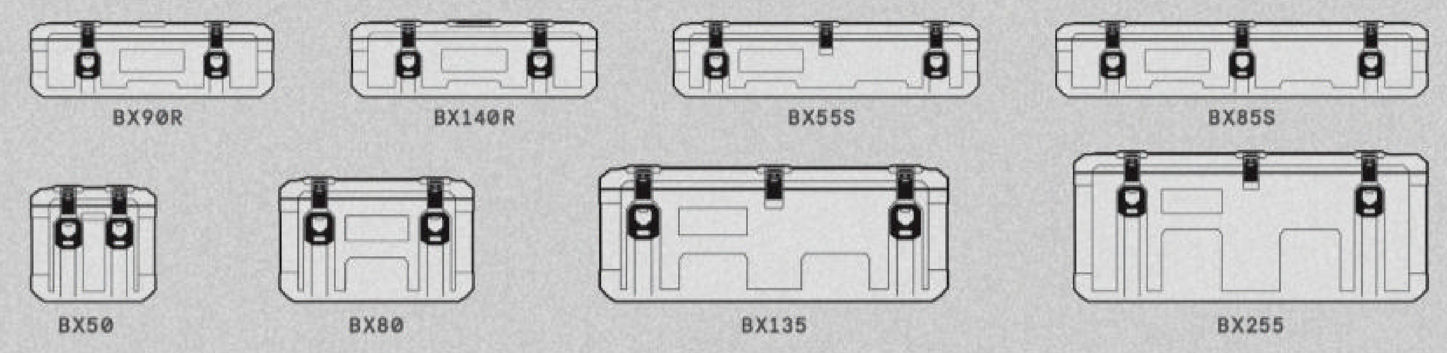
> Any of the winches tested would be suitable for most people's needs, and the spectrum of price points makes winches more accessible than ever.

What setup would I put on my vehicle? If my mounting system was exposed and I could mount just about anything to it, it would be the Superwinch SX10SR, MaxTrax static winch rope, and a Hawsepro 4 roller fairlead, small in size but with a large radius roller, reducing protrusion from the bumper. That would be the best bang for the buck.

WINCH COMPARISON

MANUFACTURER	**WARN M8274**	**COMEUP SEAL GEN2 9.5RSI**	**IRONMAN MONSTER 9500**	**WARN ZEON 10-S PLATINUM**	**SUPERWINCH SX10SR**
Price (MSRP)	$3,559	$1,580	$699	$2,665	$764
Weight as tested, pounds	83	74	60	69	56
Bolt pattern, inches	4.5 x 10 (front mount)	4.5 x 10	4.5 x 10	4.5 x 10	4.5 x 10
Motor control	Contactor	Contactor	Contactor	Contactor	Contactor
Motor horsepower	6	5	5.5	Not published	5.5
Gear type	Spur	Planetary	Planetary	Planetary	Planetary
Gear ratio	134:1	159:1	265:1	162:1	218:1
Clutch type	Sliding-motor pinion gear	Pull and turn	Rotating ring gear	Remote	Pull and turn
Brake type	Disc brake	External cone	In drum cam	Mechanical cone	Internal mechanical
Rope provided, feet and inches	150, 3/8 Spydura	100, 3/8 Synthetic	92, 5/16 Dyneema	100, 3/8 Spydura	80, 3/8 Synthetic
Control pack can be mounted remotely	Yes	No	Yes	Yes w/additional kit	Yes
Available for 24 volts	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Country of origin	US	Taiwan	China	US, with foreign parts	China
Warranty	Lifetime mechanical, 7 years electrical	Lifetime mechanical, 3 years electrical	5 years mechanical and electrical	Lifetime mechanical, 7 years electrical	Lifetime mechanical, 7 years electrical
NO LOAD LINE SPEED					
Feet per minute	113.207	43.327	23.94	47.472	41.208
TORTURE TEST: 3 TO 23 DEGREES, 70 FEET					
Ambient air temp, °F	50.7	61.4	51	61.6	76.7
Average time to pull	01:51.3	3:15.66	03:18.1	3:59	2:54.1
Line speed, feet per minute	37.74	21.46	18.18	17.59	24.13
Max amperage draw	291.1	337.6	161	241.7	230.3
Motor temp bottom/top #1, °F	52.1/65.6	104.9/119.6	83.9/87.1	87.3/ 96.1	92.8/90.5
Motor temp bottom/top #2, °F	51.9/56.9	130.2/146.6	120.1/150.1	112.2/127.1	110.1/124.7
Motor temp bottom/top #3, °F	78.0/65.5	138.7/163.2	161.5/ 219.0	138.8/133.0	138.6/142.9
Gearbox temp bottom/ top #1, °F	53.5/60.0	111.0/111.4	52.2/56.1	94.7/104.5	79.9/80.3
Gearbox temp bottom/ top #2, °F	56.9/66.7	171.5/175.9	64.8/89.1	119.6/134.4	88.2/89.1
Gearbox temp bottom/ top #3, °F	76.4/73.0	197.6/201.1	100.0/105.5	138.9/127.2	89.9/95.1
Drum temp bottom #1, °F	48.4	88.7	72.6	104.1	167.8
Drum temp bottom #2, °F	48.8	99.4	119.4	148.7	174.4
Drum temp bottom #3, °F	50.2	106.7	219	149.9	207.7
Max motor/gearbox temp after lowering,°F	84.7/80.2	110.1/267.9*	219	138.8/139.9	158.4/100.4
STALL TESTING					
Max tested pulling load, pounds	7,985*	9,755	9,525	9,785*	10,190*
Rated load, pounds	10,000	9,500	9500	10,000	10,000
Pass or fail	N/A	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass
	*Winch stall test was stopped due to Warn 11078 bracket twisting	*Cone brake is located next to gearbox, causing the gearbox to absorb the heat while lowering		*Winch stalled at 9,785 pounds	*Winch exceeded stall by 190 pounds and hadn't stalled yet

PELICAN
BUILT TO PROTECT
THE FIRST
QUICK-RELEASE CARGO CASE
WITH ANTI-THEFT TECHNOLOGY
QUICK RELEASE | WEATHER-TESTED | MULTIPLE MOUNTING | NO DRILLING REQUIRED


BX90R
BX140R
BX55S
BX85S
BX50
BX80
BX135
BX255

LOCKED TO LOOSE IN 14 SECONDS. Be prepared for any adventure with the Pelican™ Cargo Case collection. The first quick-release Cargo Case that releases in 14 seconds. Built with the same legendary performance and quality Pelican is known for, Pelican Cargo Cases are extremely durable and weather-tested. Pelican Cargo Cases can be attached to your roof rack, truck bed, or stored in your SUV. Our Vehicle Mounting Kits provide a hands-free open lid design for quick access (sold separately). Available for Toyota™, Ford™, Chevrolet™, Jeep™, Ram™ and other vehicles. No drilling required.

Padlocks not included. Sold separately.

AVAILABLE AT PELICAN.COM/CARGO

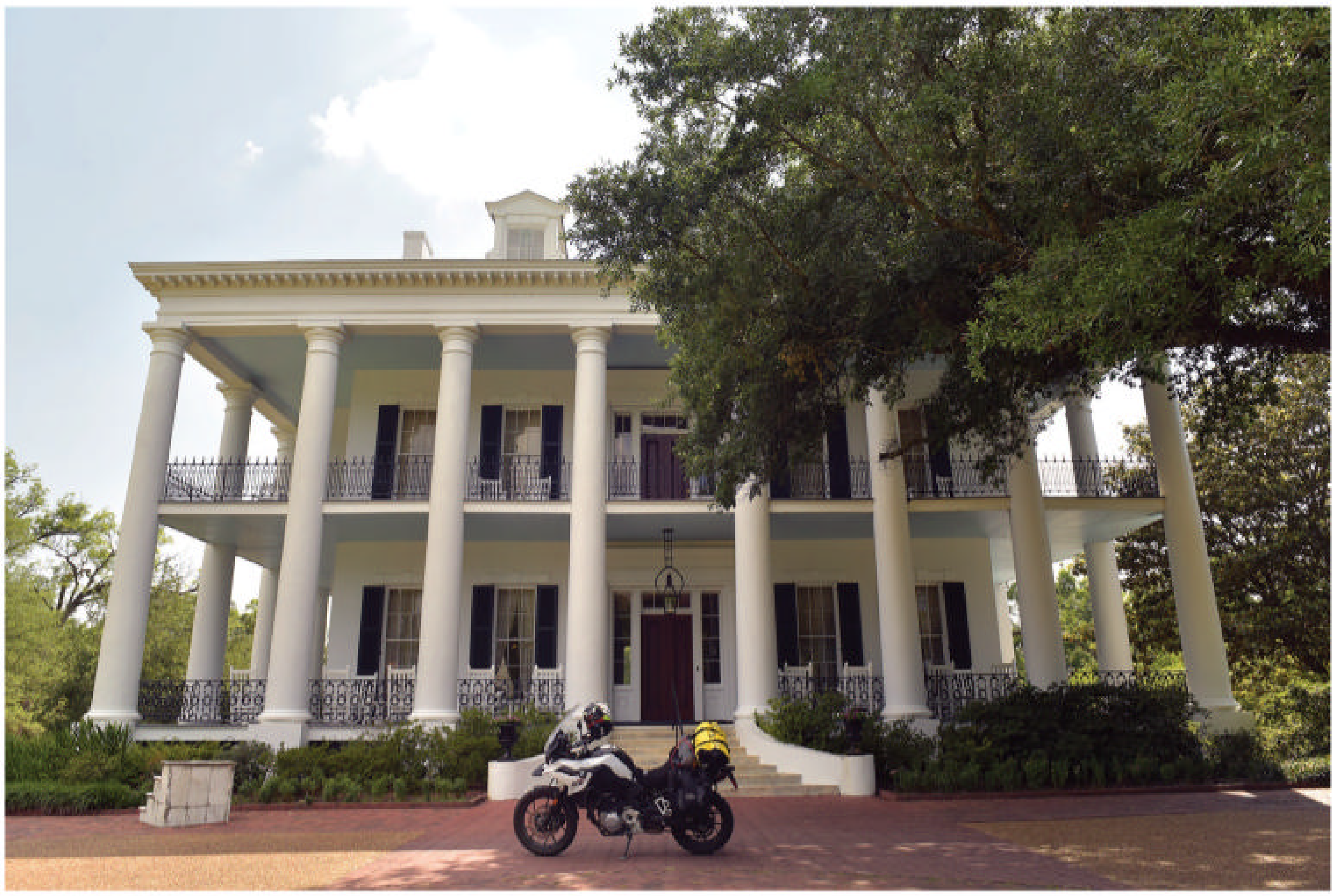
LIMITED LIFETIME GUARANTEE (CASES ONLY) | 3 YEAR GUARANTEE (MOUNTS) | BUILT TO PROTECT
See pelican.com/warranty for full details.

©2022 Pelican Products, Inc. 23215 Early Avenue, Torrance, CA 90505 • Tel (310) 326-4700 • Toll Free (866) 270-2753 • Fax (310) 326-3311
Chevrolet is a trademark of General Motors LLC. Ford is a trademark of Ford Motor Company. Jeep and Ram are trademarks of FCA US LLC. Toyota is a trademark of Toyota Motor Corporation.
All other trademarks are registered and/or unregistered trademarks of Pelican Products, Inc., its subsidiaries and/or affiliates.

Mississippi by Morning

The Sweet Land of the South

By Marianne Todd



Clockwise from left: Centuries-old oaks drip with Spanish moss along the state's winding roads. | Dunleith Mansion, built in 1855, welcomes road-weary visitors to its stately grounds. | The original footpath of the Natchez Trace is sunken from the footsteps of soldiers, traders, settlers, and Native Americans. | Remnant columns of the largest antebellum Greek Revival mansion ever built in Mississippi rise from the earth. | An 18th-century gravestone bears the marks of weathered years at Church Hill. | **Opening spread:** Mississippi is a land of oddities with small towns and rural roads that traverse the state's unique and diverse history.

The Mississippi Valley is as reposeful as a dreamland, nothing worldly about it … nothing to hang a fret or a worry upon.
– Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

Author William Faulkner probably said it best. "To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi."

I grew up hearing this quote frequently. Having been raised in the hotbed of the Civil Rights Movement, I had always assumed I knew what it meant. We had arrived in the South in the early '70s, just after integration. As a child, I didn't quite understand the complexities of this new land. It was hot and humid and filled with strange politics and unconventional social customs, a language to which my ear had not yet been trained, and music so good that I've yet to find anything elsewhere quite like it.

Dad loved to fish and camp back then, and having camped for three straight months upon our arrival, found there was never a shortage of areas in which to pitch a tent or toss a line. Mom would later plant those abundant catches in her garden, which produced tomatoes ripe with redness and oozing with juice. We ate okra straight from the stalk and enjoyed an ample bounty of sweet corn each summer.

I can't think of another place so filled with dichotomies, whose rich soil produced even richer cotton by the hands of the abjectly impoverished and whose pained souls strummed baling wire for comfort, an act that birthed the music of an entire nation—perhaps even the world.

For what Mississippi lacks in public lands, it makes up for in its history, music, lush landscapes, wild, rolling rivers, and in its abundance of wildlife and pristine waterways. It is still a place filled with contradictions, but it also has its share of consistencies. It's also a place in which you can get lost, whose lapping river banks with their choirs of cicadas lullaby you to sleep in your tent at night, whose sunsets linger for seeming hours, and whose dirt roads lead to the good stuff, if you know which paths to travel.

THE **RIVER REGION**

The Natchez Trace, a winding 444-mile road from Natchez, Mississippi, to Nashville, Tennessee, has, along its course, 10,000 years of history and an untold number of footsteps from the people who traversed it. The current paved Trace follows the original dirt path that served as a route for Native Americans, European settlers, slave traders, and soldiers. It is run by the National Park Service and is the seventh most visited national park in the nation. Milepost 1 begins in Natchez.

To get to Natchez, you really have to be going to Natchez. It's not on a main road or leading to anywhere in particular. You can reach it via Vicksburg from the famed US Highway 61, the Great River Road National Scenic Byway that lazily

Top row from left: Wagner's Grocery sits much as it did during its heyday in the late 1800s. | The rotunda of Longwood, the mansion that was never finished, remains as it was in 1861. | Cyclists make their way through the 1,800-acre Vicksburg National Military Park. | **Bottom row from left:** The African-American monument on the Vicksburg Battlefield is one of 1,325 artworks dedicated to the park since 1899. | The unfinished antebellum home Longwood is the largest octagonal house in the United States. | Paint cans and tools sit in the dust, left by craftsmen in 1861, abandoned when they went to fight in the Civil War.

meanders the entirety of the Mississippi River. You can get there via Interstate 59 by turning west onto US Highway 84. Or, simply hit the Trace on any point and follow it south. Whichever way, there is an abundance of history, backroads, camping, and hiking to be had along the journey.

Because the people of pre-Civil War Natchez were largely Union sympathizers and voted against secession, the vast majority of its antebellum structures were spared by Union soldiers and are intact and in use. But the history here dates even further, and historical sites like the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians offer archaeological evidence that the area was inhabited by such people as early as the year 700.

I rolled into Natchez on two wheels and was greeted by Adam Elliott, who spent five years along the river as an outdoor guide. "Mississippi has a lot to offer; you just have to work a little harder to find it," he said. "It's not just laid out there like a clear path before your feet. You do have to get out there and drive a bit, get lost possibly."

Elliott grew up reading Twain, an author whose words inspired him to trade his work keys for a paddle. He headed to Lake Itasca, Minnesota, where he loaded his canoe into the Mississippi River headwaters and 84 days later paddled into the Gulf of Mexico. He told me of roads in and around Natchez worthy of two- or four-wheel excursions. They're laced with curves and dips and Spanish moss dripping from massive old oaks. They pass houses, churches, farms, and plantations established long before the war, fields of cotton, and structures that have long been lost to time. They are canopied and cool and seldomly used. Like most backroads in Natchez, the pace is slow, and rightfully so; there's a lot to see in the dense forests here. The 38-mile trip I traversed with Elliott in his 2008 Toyota Tacoma 4WD and then later on my BMW F 750 GS took me past such sites on a mix of paved, dirt, and gravel roads (30 percent paved). Heading north of the city, we stopped at Church Hill, a three-sided intersection that offers a 1790's church, and across the street, Wagner's Grocery, in use as early as 1877. On the third leg is Wyolah, a plantation dating to the 1830s, restored in recent years along with its outbuildings: a doctor's office, slave cabins, a commissary, and cook house. So near the Trace is Church Hill that cross-country and local cyclists divert to the area for its winding curves and abundant scenery. And so dedicated is the Natchez Trace to cyclists that they are offered the right of way along the entirety of the Trace.

Allen Richard has been biking the Trace for 24 years. He and a group of 21 cyclists once traveled from Natchez to Nashville, then biked the 444 miles home. "We did it in six days," he said.

Richard and his fellow Natchez cyclists routinely plot new journeys and share their maps readily on Strava and MapMyRide. The routes connect paved roads for summer riding and gravel roads during cooler seasons. They pair scenery with history and food, he said. "If you connect all the county roads, you can make a loop to circumnavigate the county. The Trace then becomes an artery, and there are tons of roads connected to it."

The route through historic Rodney, Mississippi, begins on a gravel road at Mount Locust, a Trace inn from the 1700s at milepost 15.5, and passes a church where a Civil War cannonball remains lodged in its wall. "There are tons of historic sites, historic cemeteries hidden in the woods, gravel roads with that old Trace effect where the sides of the road go way over your head, and you're riding way below the trunks of trees," Richard said. Another route, the Fried Chicken Ride, combines historical locations with, you guessed it, fried chicken.

It would take days, perhaps even weeks, to visit every historic structure in Natchez, but one in particular, Longwood, seems to embody the South's history like no other.

Construction began on the mansion just prior to the Civil War. This 32,000 square-foot, 32-room octagon structure was to be the premier home of North America, serving as a summer house for its wealthy cotton plantation owners, whose slaves handmade its one million bricks on-site.

The house's architect had been from the northeast, and after work was halted at the outbreak of the Civil War, he and his craftsmen returned home, many of them to fight. But here's the interesting part: the construction elements, the scaffolding, the tools, cans of paint, and moldings, were left where the craftsmen had been working, and there they remain. Nearly 160 years later, visitors to the home can see its unfinished condition as it originally was.

It's a place in which you can get lost, whose lapping river banks with their choirs of cicadas lullaby you to sleep in your tent at night, whose sunsets linger for seeming hours, and whose dirt roads lead to the good stuff, if you know which paths to travel.

The City of Natchez is large enough to equip your trip and refill supplies. You'll find Airbnb options and a number of restaurants for road-weary travelers who need a few days of comfort.

Sixty-three miles north of Natchez on US Highway 61 lies one of the nation's most historic and important sites in the turning point of the Civil War, the Vicksburg National Military Park, which offers a self-guided tour along the gently rolling hills of the second-largest battlefield and largest Union burial ground in the nation.

I arrived in the early morning hours on my motorcycle and was met with other motorcyclists, bicyclists, runners, and hikers taking advantage of the cooler morning air. The June summer heat was now spilling into July. The timing was appropriate. Confederate forces would surrender in a few short days, exactly 159 years ago.

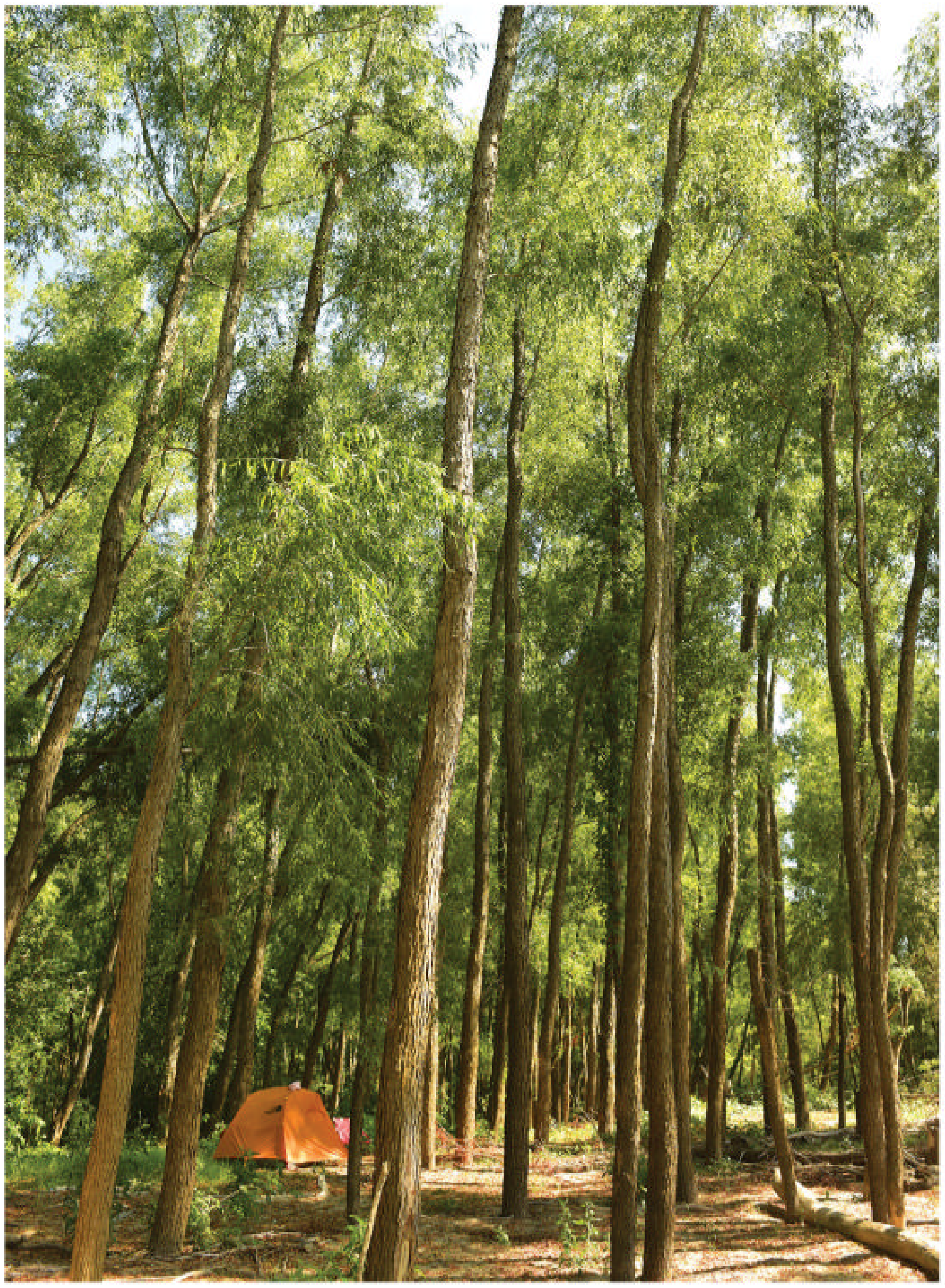
I pulled over to view a memorial, and my eye caught the bicycles on Maria and Chris Mischke's black Hybrid Infiniti QX60. Hailing from Eerie, Colorado, the couple was making their way across the country and stopping to take advantage of cycling routes, carrying four bicycles between them. They had initially decided to drive the 16-mile route through the park but opted to make another round on their bikes. It turns out Chris had first visited the park when he was 10 years old, "And I didn't appreciate it then," he said. He's an eighth-grade history teacher now.

"Maria and I kept thinking about the heat and the geography and the engineering there must have been during the siege campaign," he said. "The positioning of the troops, on either side of the battlefield, how close they were—I bet they even talked a little smack back and forth."

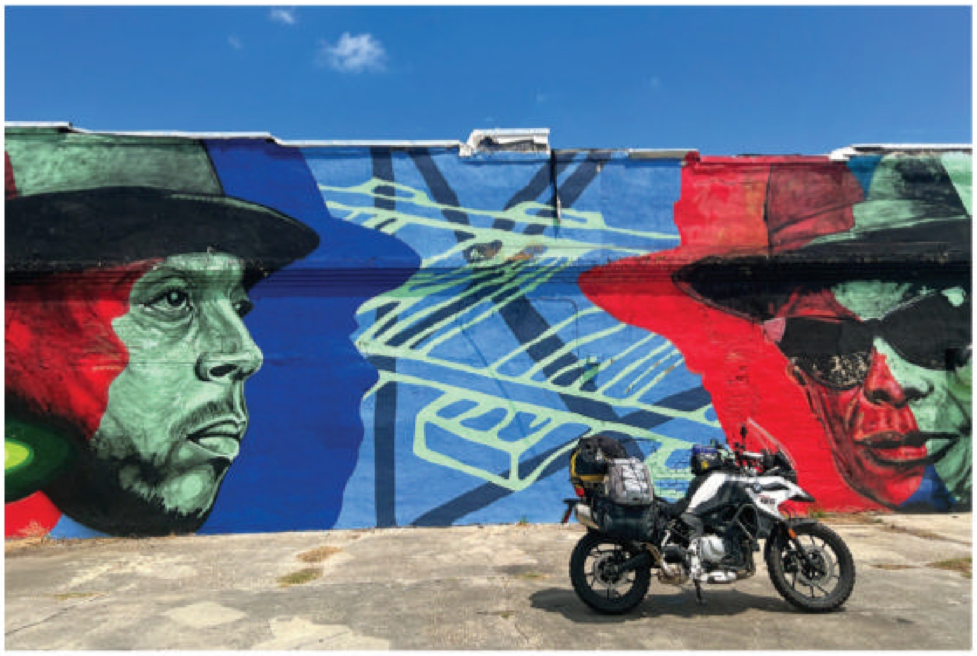
As visitors roll along the park's winding roads, under the battlefield lies the bodies of more than 17,000 troops, with more than 13,000 of them unidentified.

It would take weeks to properly visit the 1,325 historic monuments and markers and 20 miles of reconstructed trenches and earthworks found in this 1,800-acre park. As the day went by, I found a quiet spot, parked my bike, and sat in the shade near a trench. All morning, the eyes of park busts commemorating heroic men fol-

The Mississippi Delta/Was shining like a National guitar/
I am following the river down the highway/Through the
cradle of the Civil War. –Paul Simon, “Graceland”



Delta Bohemian



Clockwise from top right: Chilly Billy Howell is the Delta’s original overlander and offers tours of the Mississippi Delta. | Trees sway in the breezes of the Mississippi River, a coastline teaming with wildlife and few people. | Murals depict Clarksdale’s connection as the Home of the Blues. | A Port Authority boat skims the Mississippi River at sunset. | A tent is pitched along the lonesome coastline of the underpopulated Mississippi River. | **Opposite:** Cleveland Tourism Director Sean Johnson eyes the river for signs of water level changes. | The Mississippi Delta is punctuated by flourishing cypress swamps and ample wildlife.

MAKE CORNBREAD
NOT WAR

lowed me as I passed by, and now I sat in the very spot where many took their last breaths. Oddly, no traffic passed me for almost an hour, and I was grateful for the solitude near the thick forest wall. It's difficult to imagine what might have been nearly 160 years ago, who had stepped on the forest floor long before my own footprints were left, or the atrocities and agonies that took place on this hallowed ground. The energy there is palpable and real; even the trees, plants, and insects seem to understand it. Friends tell me the cannons there are so numerous that, as children, they discovered them in the forests, lying under the thick kudzu vines that were introduced to the state in the late 1800s.

The art within the park is nestled along valleys and rolling hills, and dense forests; it seeks to commemorate the dead from each state. Produced by the nation's leading artists and architects, the installments are said to be valued in the billions today.

THE **DELTA**

Farther up the river, the land changes drastically, as does the history. The Great River Road continues here, encompassing more than 2,000 miles of diverse state and local roads that traverse the length of the Mississippi River from its headwaters in Minnesota to its exit at the Gulf of Mexico. More than 800 miles of adjoining gravel levee roads run the course of the Mississippi River, offering scenic views of farmland, cypress swamps, glimpses of Americana, eateries, museums, and historical sites. Find the offshoot trails and pathways that lead to sites of days gone by, and you've got yourself a bonafide Southern adventure.

Along the more beaten paths, explorers to the Mississippi Delta can learn of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, an event that contributed to one of the world's greatest human migrations, see where Kermit the Frog was birthed, visit the home of iconic blues artist Muddy Waters, and see where President Theodore Roosevelt earned the nickname Teddy Bear after refusing to kill a captured bear at Rolling Fork. The state's blues trail doesn't begin or end here, but it certainly gains a fair amount of traction. The blues greats, the giants, the artists that created the foundation from which all other American music was created, originated on this same fertile soil.

US Highway 61, fondly known as the Blues Highway, will lead you to the Grammy Museum in downtown Cleveland, designated there since more Grammy winners come from Mississippi than any other state. You also visit where famed bluesman Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil in exchange for being the greatest bluesman ever.

It's hard to gauge the enormity of the sandbars. They're untouched, and the only footprints I found were of turtles, raccoons, and deer.

While Cleveland's tourism mission is music driven, it's hard to ignore the waters passing by miles-long pristine sandbars on the Mississippi River in nearby Rosedale. Great River Road Campground on Highway 1 is undergoing renovation of developed campsites. It offers a massive oxbow lake, cypress swamps, and endlessly long sandbars along the Mississippi River, along with a gravel levee road that bypasses great swaths of agricultural fields, swamps, and forests.

Sean Johnson, the new tourism director in Cleveland, was handed the reins to the project and has plans to bring in a horse outfitter so visitors can traverse the great sandbars there. I took a sunset boat ride with Sean and his colleague Robert Maxwell, the port director, to survey the river's edge. It's hard to gauge the enormity of the sandbars. They're untouched, and the only footprints I found were of turtles, raccoons, and deer. Trees of driftwood punctuate the landscape, and as the sun sets over the treeline on the Arkansas side, everything seems to come aglow. The colors deepen, and the water appears softer.

River travel here has been used by man since 10,000 BC when the Mississippi River was but a series of braided streams. The Spanish explorer and *conquistador* Hernando de Soto first crossed the Mississippi when it flowed in a different direction.

Robert said the river's large sandbanks are present most of the year, becoming even more so with falling water levels. He and river experts like John Ruskey, owner of Quapaw Canoe Company in nearby Clarksdale, and Quapaw guide Mark River keep an eyeful watch on river erosion, which comes from silt carried downstream. As river banks rise, the water lessens. Man-made rock walls created to drive the swifter currents for towboats and barges contribute to the problem, Mark said.

Sixty miles upstream from Cleveland, Mark and I took a Chevy Suburban from Clarksdale north to Helena, Arkansas, and put a handmade canoe into the water. We had packed it with enough camping gear for the night, but since the water had dropped 2 feet in previous days, it was hard to find a good spot to dock. As evidenced by their hoofprints, even the deer turned back when the mud became deep enough.

Just a country boy, who combed his hair/ Put on the shirt his mother made/ And he went on the air/And he shook it like a chorus girl. –Gillian Welch, "Elvis Presley Blues"

KERMIT'S
OUTLAW
KITCHEN

UNKNOWN
CONFEDERATE
SOLDIER

1245
TransAmerica Trail
Ground Zero

Top row from left: The unmarked graves of Confederate soldiers sit silently along the original Natchez Trace footpath. | Tupelo, the home of American icon Elvis Presley, pays homage with numerous murals and statues throughout the city. | Sunlight spills onto the unmarked grave of a Confederate soldier along the Natchez Trace north of Tupelo. | **Bottom row from left:** Guitars line the wall at the Hopson Plantation in Clarksdale, the 1920's commissary turned blues hall. | Sam Correro, creator of the TransAmerica Trail, checks his mail at his home along the route in Tennessee. | Elvis Presley bought his first guitar here at the iconic Tupelo Hardware Store.

We found a sandy beach on Montezuma Island on the Mississippi side. I pitched my tent in a cozy wooded area while Mark chose to go about 600 feet downstream, nearer the beach. I had forgotten the crescendo of insect voices that ensue as the sun goes down in this region. In the Delta, the sun is high in the sky, direct, and rather unforgiving against the flat earth. People tend to summon visions of the West when Big Sky is mentioned, but Mississippi has its own version, and the sun takes its time to set here, slow, like molasses.

A coyote came to visit my tent during the night. I heard it, but I didn't see it. Mark heard it, too, and found its scat near the door of his tent the next morning. Mark found it amusing. "He was letting me know this is his territory."

Nearer our kitchen area, the footprints of the coyote were deep. Mark spied the empty shells of turtle eggs, apparently eaten by the coyote during the night. We had a lazy breakfast, then loaded the boat for a paddle home. I had a friend to meet.

Chilly Billy Howell has been getting lost on the back roads of the Delta nearly all his life. He grew up here, left for Colorado as a young man, then returned home a couple of decades later a wiser man. These days, he offers tours of the Delta and shows people how they, too, can get lost in the wilds of Mississippi.

I jumped into his red 2019 Jeep Wrangler, and we headed out on a country road. He has his head firmly wrapped around the Faulkner quote. "I start my tour with it," he said. We stopped to view the nest of a bald eagle. The eagle wasn't home, but the enormity of the nest was breathtaking. Billy has given 735 tours to 2,000 people since 2015. They come to connect with the music but also to the land. "I call them regional identity tours," he said. "It's a complete look at the Delta, just one man's perspective. I take it from the macro to the micro and spend much more time in the outback now."

He and his wife, Madge, live about 20 miles north of Clarksdale, a town of oddities in its own right, on Moon Lake, a 2,200-acre oxbow. He kayaks 18 miles of it every day and spends his afternoons articulating the area's geography and culture to visitors, the flora and the fauna, the hidden gems made famous by Mississippi writers, cypress swamps, river roads, and wildlife. Back to the Faulkner quote. "Everything is subjective here. There are no metaphysical certitudes in the Mississippi Delta," he said. He stops along a gravel levee road to share a cracker with a donkey. "If you apply logic, you're behind the curve to begin with. Once that makes sense, everything makes sense, and then nothing makes sense. Faulkner meant that to understand something globally, you must first understand something more completely." Billy laid his narrative down. These are words he has spoken before. "Oppression didn't influence music so much as culture did. It gave it a voice, but it was really bucolic, pastoral. I mean, oppression was a catalyst, but the land formed it. I walk people into the cotton fields and show them the horizon, and they begin to understand."

Clarksdale is an oddity, the proverbial enigma wrapped in a riddle. It is rich with the talent of visual artists and musicians. Actor Morgan Freeman still lives there full time and operates his blues club, Ground Zero, replete with an old couch on the porch. To the locals, he's not God. He's just one of them. The city offers its share of music festivals that draw campers to the banks of the Sunflower River. It also offers genuineness in its hospitality. When the townspeople ask how you're doing, they *really* do want to know.

THE **HILL COUNTRY**

Head west out of Clarksdale and drive over the famed Tallahatchie Bridge from which the fabled Billie Joe MacAllister jumped, and you'll eventually arrive in Tupelo. Tupelo is famous for a lot of things, but more people flock here per year to see the tiny home where American rock 'n' roll icon Elvis Presley was born and the hardware store where he bought his first guitar more than anything else.

They also come up—or down—the Trace, to the tune of 6.4 million visitors annually. Here, the Trace prepares to wind its way into Tennessee, passing by Civil War gravesites, temple mounds, ferry crossings, Native American villages, and battlefields. There are numerous hiking and camping opportunities here and, further north, a connection to the TransAmerica Trail.

I rode as far as milepost 385.9 to the Meriwether Lewis gravesite. One of the most visited spots on the Trace, it offers a campground and a reconstructed version of Grinder's Stand, where Lewis' life ended. Lewis became governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory after his famed Lewis and Clark expedition that provided a route to the Pacific Northwest.

I decided to return to Tupelo through another historic region, the battlefield of Shiloh, Tennessee, and the historically important City of Corinth, Mississippi. The route would take me south along State Highway 43 in Hohenwald which connects its winding and shaded path to State Highway 13, which ultimately runs into US Highway 64. The ride isn't short on beauty, pastoral lands, forests, rivers, and small American towns. My goal was to reach the TransAmerica Trail, more specifically, the part of the route that passes by its creator's home. Sam Correro has been mapping this bucket list trail for 37 years. It connects a series of American roads, mostly dirt, from coast to coast in more than 2,000 miles of connecting trail. At 82, he's still mapping it and has nearly finished a 10,000-mile route to circumnavigate the country.

Several social media pages are dedicated to the TAT, with a combined 60,000 fans. While motorcycles are plentiful along the Trace, it is the adventure and dual-sport bikes that braap this route.

Sam invited me into his home and handed me a glass of sweet tea. We looked over the multitude of maps on the desk where he puts it all together. He said he's eyeing a Kawasaki KLX300 for his next trip along the TAT, planned for 2023 with his son. Some say it's no easy feat with muddy roads in the south and steep inclines in the west. Baby heads and mountain passes await the most adventurous of riders on this trail, but Sam isn't reserved about riding it all again. "That's why they call it The Rockies. It's rocky," he said. "The rest of it is really tame."

Returning to Tupelo, I rode by the hardware store where Elvis bought his first guitar, stopped, and took a picture of my bike in front of it. This, too, is hallowed ground. Elvis, who was born to a family of poor means, who picked polk salad in the nearby woods for his dinner, and who grew to be adored by the world, probably understood Faulkner better than anyone. He was, after all, the walking embodiment of his environment. Welch summed it up perfectly: "And he shook it like a holy roller baby/With his soul at stake/With his soul at stake." Mississippi just doesn't get any more Mississippi than that.

Wagner's Grocery sits at the historic intersection of Church Hill and Wyolah Plantation. | Cannons line the trenches at the Vicksburg National Military Park amid 20 miles of reconstructed battlefields. | Travelers make their way along the dirt road leading to Longwood.

THE RIVER REGION

- Camping can be found at milepost 8.1 on the Trace at Natchez State Park, which offers 68 sites for developed camping, primitive camping, and cabins. Reservations recommended. Some sites are on a first-come, first-served basis. The campground has a bathhouse, fire rings, and a boat launch.
- Travel a little farther north to mile marker 54.8 to Rocky Springs. Run by the National Park Service, this campground offers 22 sites for tents and developed camping on a first-come, first-served basis, bathrooms, and an hour-long hike through the woods to Old Town, a ghost town in the woods with a church and cemetery remnants.
- Homochitto National Forest lies about 30 miles east of Natchez, off US Highway 84. This nearly 200,000-acre forest offers 22 campsites, group camping, a 12-acre, spring-fed lake, swimming, fishing, biking and hiking trails, horseback riding, and bathhouses. The area has steep terrain. Reservations required.
- Grand Gulf Military Park lies just northwest of Port Gibson. Remnants of cannons, Confederate and Union uniforms, and muskets tell the story of the battle along the Mississippi River. The area is replete with a 1790's Spanish home, carriage house with a Civil War ambulance, blacksmith shop, and jail. It also offers an intact dog trot house from 1768, a water wheel, two forts, an observation tower, and a historic cemetery. Its 450 acres are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and host both developed and tent camping.

THE DELTA

- Lake Washington, south of Greenville, Missisipi, has abundant fishing with crappie, catfish, and bluegill, and seasonal duck hunting.
- Warfield Point Park, also in Greenville, offers camping along the Mississippi River with a 38-foot observation tower and ATV trails.
- Leroy Percy State Park and Campground in Hollandale is the largest and oldest Mississippi park and offers bubbling hot springs, cypress trees, and ancient live oaks with Spanish moss. Leroy Percy is also famous for its alligator population, and visitors can observe them from a raised boardwalk or look for deer, squirrels, turkeys, ducks, and doves along its nature trails. Camp in developed sites, pitch tents, or rent cabins here. The adjoining Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge is identified by the National Audubon Society as having more species of birds than any other location in the nation and thus lures birdwatchers from around the world.

THE HILL COUNTRY

- Located close to Tupelo, Trace State Park offers 52 sites, developed and tent camping; Tombigbee Lake State Park has 20 sites, showers, developed and tent camping; Elvis Presley Lake and Campground is undergoing renovation and is scheduled to be reopened in 2024.
- Tishomingo State Park lies 45 miles northeast of Tupelo in the foothills of the Appalachians and offers 62 sites for developed and tent camping, and is adjacent to the Trace. Thousand Trails Wilderness Preserve has more than 100 sites for developed and tent camping, cabins, hiking trails, and a camp store.
- Meriwether Lewis Campground lies on the Natchez Trace at milepost 385.9 and offers restrooms, drinking water, and hiking for its 32 primitive campsites. No reservations are required, and there are no fees. The campground is adjacent to the Meriwether Lewis burial ground and monument.

BRONCO
ARB
Summit Bumper
Zenith Bumper

TIME-HONORED
QUALITY

Harsh environments and time are the true test of quality. Since 1975, ARB has pushed the limits using the Australian Outback as its testing ground. If you drive a 4WD to *drive* it, then you already understand the difference quality makes.

PROTECTION
SUSPENSION
LIGHTS
DRAWERS
CAMPING

©2022 ARB USA ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Bronco is a registered trademark of Ford Motor Company.
ARB USA is not affiliated with Ford Motor Company.

ARBUSA.com/Ford-Bronco

LEARN HOW TO BUILD
your overlanding vehicle
from stock.

ZERO TO HERO

X OVERLAND

OVERLANDER NETWORK

TEST-DRIVE THE MASTERCLASS!
overlandernetwork.com

AN XOVERLAND PRODUCTION, AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY ON OVERLANDER NETWORK.

Blanket Statement

From the fancy to frugal, there's a camp blanket for everyone.

By Ashley Giordano and Scott Brady
Photography by Richard Giordano

OVERLAND
EXPO 2023

GET OUTFITTED. GET TRAINED. GET INSPIRED.
THE WORLD IS WAITING!

@OVERLANDEXPO
#OVERLANDEXPO

WEST//
MAY 19-21, 2023
FLAGSTSFF, AZ

PACIFIC NW//
JULY 7-9, 2023
REDMOND, OR

MTN WEST//
AUGUST 25-27, 2023
LOVELAND, CO

EAST//
OCTOBER 6-8, 2023
ARRINGTON, VA

GO TO OVERLANDEXPO.COM FOR MORE INFO & TO BUY TICKETS.

Some swear by synthetic or down blankets due to their lightweight and packable nature. | **Opening page:** Using recycled materials and focusing on versatility, outdoor brands have taken camp blankets to the next level.

When Chief Three Eagles, leader of the Salish peoples, first encountered the Lewis and Clark Expedition party in the wide valley of Ross' Hole, Montana, in 1805, he was baffled. The men weren't wearing any blankets. Had they been robbed? "Bring the best buffalo skins," he is said to have requested, "one for each man to sit on. Bring the best buffalo robes, and put them over the men's shoulders." Although the men involved in the Lewis and Clark Expedition did carry blankets (packed away in their bags), the team only used them for sleeping. But this cultural exchange broke the ice between the two parties, and it wasn't the first time (or the last) that a blanket would be used for more than physical warmth.

We tuck ourselves into bed each night, snuggling underneath this seemingly simple and omnipresent item. Whether a linen sheet, down duvet, or wool varietal, these comfortable coverings have been the fabric of our lives for much of human existence. Ancient Egyptians used linen bed sheets, while wool blankets graced the beds of the Roman Empire. Wealthy Vikings used cotton and silk sheets with feather duvets, and animal hides such as sheepskin were a feature of longhouse beds. In North America, blankets played a role in trade long before the wool covering was issued to military forces in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, there are numerous choices depending on where in the world we live.

When it comes to camping and overlanding, I've typically stuck to a duvet or my trusty Marmot sleeping bag. An extra blanket can seem like an unnecessary luxury when space is limited or you're on a tight budget. But camp blankets also bring a feeling of home to your setup and can come in handy on chilly nights. I've also discovered a wide variety of camp blankets that really shine for different purposes, such as enjoying a crackling campfire, cozying up in a van or truck camper, or sharing a picnic in the grass with friends.

If you're in the market for a camp blanket, consider its purpose. How will you use it? Does it need to be multi-functional? Additional factors include size (will you be sharing the blanket?), packability, durability, and materials. Down blankets pack well and are lightweight, while synthetic options are generally less packable but can stand more abuse. Wool retains warmth while wet but can be heavy and scratchy. Perhaps a heavy blanket is a plus—studies show that weighted blankets can help reduce both anxiety and nighttime levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Do you require a durable water repellent (DWR) coating, or will the blanket live most of its life indoors? Finally, some blankets are not easily washable, which can be an inconvenience for some. I've whittled my top choices down to help narrow your search, no matter what you're looking for. (AG)

WOOL

ALPACA THREADZ

ANDEAN ALPACA WOOL BLANKET

Forced to put their travel company on hold in 2020, LeAnn and Brandon Morris were looking for another way to support local artisans during the global pandemic. Textiles are an important facet of Andean culture, so LeAnn and Brandon began working with local artists to create Alpaca Threadz, a fair-trade company seeking to support communities in remote Ecuador and Peru. An additional 10 percent of profits go back to local families to set "a trajectory of growth."

My initial reaction to the Alpaca Threadz camp blanket was that it was so lovely I didn't want to bring it outside. Made of 50 percent alpaca wool and 50 percent acrylic material with recycled content, this queen-size blanket feels as soft as cashmere and features a reversible Mojave design. At 7.5 by 6.5 feet, it's perfect for two people and is hypoallergenic, lightweight for its size, and large enough to share. Rather than dragging it through the dirt (although I'm sure it would hold up), this blanket's best life is in a van, truck camper, trailer, or lazily tossed on a bed in a rustic cabin.

I used this camp blanket during frosty nights in our Go Fast camper near Bryce Canyon and at a few overland rally events. This is not a throw I would allow a pet dog to squat on—it's too stylish, comfy, and special. However, there wasn't a blanket I enjoyed more while sipping my morning coffee at the dinette table or pulling up to my chin at night. Cleaning instructions are simple: dry clean, handwash, or use the machine on gentle. Tumble dry on low or air dry. (AG)

$150 | ALPACATHREADZ.COM

FLEECE

RUMPL

SHERPA PUFFY BLANKET

Rumpl founders Wylie Robinson and Nick Polinko were on a surf and ski trip in California when they found themselves without cell reception and in a car that wouldn't start. While wrapped in sleeping bags to keep warm, inspiration struck the duo, and the "sleeping bag blanket" was born. Today, Rumpl's synthetic insulation is made from recycled plastic bottles; they are a member of 1% For The Planet and are Climate Neutral and B Corporation certified.

Out of the blankets tested, I grabbed the 2.9-pound Rumpl Sherpa Puffy Blanket most often for out-of-truck pursuits. During overland rally raffles, lugging my camp chair somewhere, or heading to a bonfire with friends, the Sherpa's small size (roughly 4 by 6 feet) and use of the Cape Clip or carrying straps made it the most convenient to tote around. The blanket combines the best of both worlds: high-pile sherpa fleece on one side and an insulated DWR-finished 100 percent post-consumer recycled polyester shell on the other. I tested the two-person Ombre Plaid blanket, but it also comes in Junior and two-person sizes.

I was very satisfied with the quality of this blanket and felt confident in the stitching, materials, and construction. Plus, one of my favorite qualities is that it is so warm. I get cold easily, and the Sherpa kept the chill off during crisp spring evenings in the Rockies and acted as a comforting and effective second layer in bed. The Sherpa Puffy is machine washable. (AG)

$169 | RUMPL.COM

KELTY

FOR THE KIDS

BESTIE BLANKET

Founded in 1952, camping supply company Kelty made a splash with conifer-colored packs used during undertakings such as the American Everest Expedition of 1963. The brand has since expanded, constructing a variety of backpacking, camping, and sleep solutions. Kelty is one of the founding members of The Conservation Alliance, which prioritizes conservation efforts in the outdoor industry.

The Bestie blanket's name resonates for a good reason. It encompasses everything one seeks in a quality best friend: reliability and trustworthiness with a splash of fun. This classic camp blanket is simple, packable, soft, and comfortable. The Cloudloft insulation provides a satisfying amount of warmth for how lightweight the throw is (1.54 pounds), and the shell, made from 75D printed polyester taffeta, is pleasing to the touch. A stuff sack is included for easy transport.

Due to its 6- by 3.5-foot size, availability of fun prints (mine is a lively mix of "rooibos tea" and scout-inspired patches), and durability, this blanket is great for kids. Throwing it onto a sandy beach, a grassy knoll, or letting your pup trample over it isn't a big deal. Most of all, the Bestie provides great value for the price point, so if the kiddos bicker over it, there's likely room in the pocketbook for several. Perhaps it isn't the smallest while packed or the most technical, but it's a solid choice, comes with a lifetime warranty, and is machine washable. (AG)

$30 | KELTY.COM

DOMETIC

HEAVY-DUTY

GO CAMP BLANKET

The Dometic Go Collection is specifically designed for vehicle-based adventure pursuits, and its camp blanket is no exception. Weighing 4 pounds and spanning 6.5 by 4.5 feet while flat, this is the largest and heaviest blanket of the bunch, even when folded away in a stuff sack. If you are budgeting in the space and weight departments, a smaller, lighter blanket would be a better fit; that said, for those with ample room, Dometic's camp blanket is rugged and features a padded top, waterproof bottom, and small loops in each corner if users wish to hang it up as a tarp.

I found this blanket quite comforting while sitting by the fire, the water-resistant, tough polyester and rayon blend top felt nice against the skin, and the hefty 600D polyester and polyurethane bottom provided substantial protection. Designed for use as a picnic or personal blanket or as a weather shelter, Dometic suggests the blanket can also be used as an additional insulation for your tent floor. Sized for one small person, the Go Camp Blanket offers a limited three-year warranty and can be machine washed and dried. If you have the space, I think this throw is well-suited for rocky, dirty, or sandy ground, as a place for your dog to chillax, or as a heavy-duty top layer for sub-zero nights. (AG)

$140 | DOMETIC.COM

AERONAUT OUTDOOR GEAR
LAUNCH EDITION HOVERQUILT

LIGHTWEIGHT DOWN

AERONAUT

HOVERQUILT

You might wonder how a down blanket could ever replace your trusty sleeping bag. I pondered this myself before testing the Aeronaut Hoverquilt. Down blanket proponents point to their lightweight qualities and better movement and temperature regulation while sleeping. Featuring 750 fill power goose down, a soft 20D ripstop nylon shell, and a taffeta weave nylon liner, the Hoverquilt measures 90 inches long by 80 inches wide and weighs around 2.5 pounds. The size nearly equals a double (full), which explains why it feels more like your blanket at home than your typical mummy bag. Although the Hoverquilt is advertised as being comfortable to 30°F, the company argues it is, in reality, comparable to a 15°F rated sleeping bag (the rating references comfort rather than the bag's lower, or survival, limit).

One detriment to a lightweight, slightly slippery blanket is the tendency for your partner (aka the blanket thief) to snatch away your much-coveted covers. Fortunately, Aeronaut offers Aerostraps, which connect blanket loops with your mattress for ultimate heat retention. If you are flying solo, the blanket can be folded, burrito-style, for optimal warmth.

At a price point that could buy you a pair of 15°F sleeping bags, it's up to you and your camping style to decide if two bags (that you could also use while backpacking) or a cozy, luxurious blanket (perfect for a camper or rooftop tent) is the best option for you.

Aeronaut offers a 100 percent guarantee that instills confidence: if you're not 110 percent happy within 110 nights, the company will honor a full refund, including return shipping.

$499 | AERONAUTOUTDOOR.COM

SYNTHETIC DOWN

RUMPL

NANOLOFT FLAME

Camp puffies have numerous benefits, like reduced weight and improved insulation, but technical fabrics like polyester will melt quickly from even the most benign ember. Rumpl has now addressed fireside issues with the new NanoLoft Flame.

Impressively, the Flame weighs only a pound and packs in less volume than a 1,000-milliliter Nalgene bottle. The fire-resistant topside is made from 60 percent modacrylic and 40 percent cotton. Modacrylic provides protection from electrical arcs, most acids, moths, mildew, and UV rays; it will not wrinkle and feels soft to the touch. When tightly woven with cotton, it also has natural water resistance, further improved by the durable water repellant (DWR) finish and, most importantly, flame retardancy. The back side of the blanket is 100 percent polyester (likely a cost savings); it would be less prone to sliding off the wearer if both surfaces were modacrylic/cotton. The filling is 100 percent polyester NanoLoft, which mimics the characteristics of down, yet better survives wet conditions and repeated compressed storage.

The Flame is one of the best travel blankets I have used, serving many needs while being warmer than expected. My challenges were few, focused mainly on the 38- by 52-inch travel size, which felt more like a loincloth than a comforter. The cape clip also needs a loop on the long side. Modacrylic requires careful handling, as even one trip through a hot wash cycle or dryer could ruin it forever. (SB)

$129 | RUMPL.COM

Photo by Paula Burr

EASY TO TAKE
HARD TO BREAK
INTRODUCING OUR LIGHTEST BOTTLE YET
YETI
THE NEW YONDER™ WATER BOTTLE

RHINO-RACK®

YOUR GEAR CAN'T WAIT.
ARE WE THERE YET?

sunseeker
AWNING
RECOVERY BOARD
BRACKETS
FISHING ROD
CARRIER
PIONEER
PLATFORM
RECONN-DECK™
WITH NS BARS
DOME
AWNING

RHINORACK.COM

A Place in the Sun

Finding the right solar panels for your intended application.

By Richard Giordano

WE KEEP YOU #ROADREADY
CALIFORNIA
WAGAN 83
LEARN MORE

WAGAN TECH
iONBoost V10 TORQUE

WAGAN TECH
LITHIUM CUBE 1200

25A DC TO DC BATTERY CHARGER
40A DC TO DC BATTERY CHARGER
WAGAN TECH

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area of California for over 39 years, Wagan Tech is an automotive lifestyle company that focuses on consumer products that make life more comfortable and convenient at home and on the road. Whether overlanding, camping, or around town; we keep you and your vehicle, Road Ready.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @WAGANTECH

WWW.WAGAN.COM

WAGAN® TECH

Long-term overland travel requires self-sustained living, and part of that living demands electricity. At the very least, most travelers are using those charged particles to power 12-volt fridges and LED camp lights. More often than not, overlanders are now including induction cooktops, freezers, heaters, and large DC-to-AC inverters in their vehicle builds. As considerable electrical loads become the norm, the inclusion of absorbed glass mat (AGM) and lithium batteries are paramount. To charge those batteries, you can utilize the vehicle's alternator, but if you want to keep the battery banks topped up when sitting still in a remote location, solar is by far your best option.

In 1954, Bell Labs showcased solar panels for the first time. They used their panel to power a small toy Ferris wheel and radio transmitter. Since then, solar panels have been used around the world in both static (off-grid cabins) and dynamic use cases (recreational vehicles). Regardless of their end use, solar panels use photovoltaic modules to convert light energy from the sun (photons) to electricity. Although the specifications—namely the nominal watts rating, open circuit voltage, and closed circuit amperage—provided by manufacturers are found under standard laboratory conditions and not necessarily indicative of real-world output, they do help to differentiate the potential energy provided by various panels.

Despite being similar, many of the panels in this review are manufactured with different techniques and varying materials. These slight differences can make a big difference in the real world. If you look at all the panels rated at 100 watts, you'll soon see that several are rigid, some flexible, and a few are portable. Even among the rigid panels, you'll see varying weights and efficiencies (usually most evident in cloudy, low sun angle, or shaded conditions). Additionally, each panel may have different mounting requirements. One of the most important factors when selecting a panel is likely the price, but long-term performance and durability are critical considerations when calculating value. Overall, these comparisons should help when deciding which panel is best suited for your vehicle and when calculating how many solar panels are required for your electrical system.

TESTING

This review is aimed less at testing the panels apples-to-apples to confirm maximum power output and more at showing what each panel (and type) does in varying lighting conditions. We measured the short circuit amperage of each panel throughout the day (for a total of 13 hours) until shade from the adjacent building covered them. I chose a clear and sunny day, but there was intermittent cloud cover. These short instances allowed me to see how much each panel's output decreased when not in direct sunlight. For this review, we selected a handful of unregulated rigid, flexible, and portable panels.

Solar panel output is directly related to the solar altitude angle and the solar azimuth angle. We could dive into the calculations, but for the sake of this article, you can assume the following: The higher the sun is above the horizon and the more perpendicular the solar panel is to the sun, the higher the output. Ambient temperature (and, therefore, the temperature of the solar panel) also affects output; typically, sunny and cool days provide the best results.

How does all of this affect the average overlander? Most vehicles we see traveling North America (and the world) have solar panels mounted to the roof of their camper, tent, hood, or trailer. This position, facing straight up, isn't the most efficient but is by far the easiest to manage. You install the product and forget it. For this basic test, we will do the exact same thing. The panels will be flat, with their outputs measured throughout the day. This will show how well each of the products in question works midday with the panels almost perpendicular to the sun versus morning and afternoon low solar altitude angles. We'll also look at how each performs in shaded or cloudy conditions.

I also checked to see how each item was affected by shade. Solar panels are constructed with bypass diodes between cells, or more commonly, a string of cells. The role of these diodes is to eliminate hot spots on the panel when it is partially shaded. If there are a large number of cells per bypass diode, there is a good chance that a small amount of shade on a solar panel will eliminate all power output. Conversely, if there are bypass diodes on every cell, the cells that remain in the sun will still produce power. To test this, I simply shaded the bottom half of each panel and confirmed whether or not there was any power output.

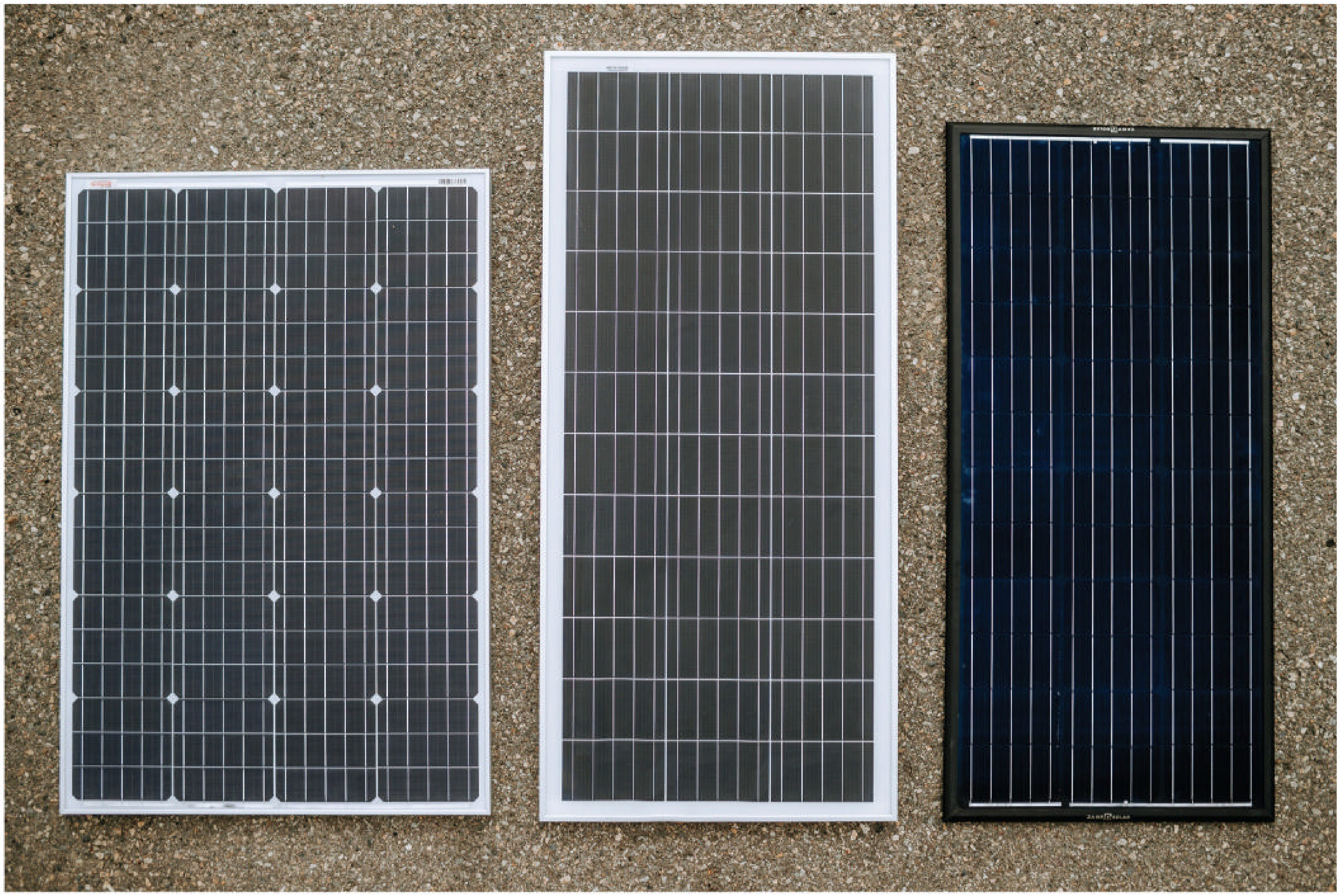
TIP

The higher the sun is above the horizon and the more perpendicular the solar panel is to the sun, the higher the output. Ambient temperature also affects output; typically, sunny and cool days provide the best results.

Solar panels are generally categorized in watts, but the number we'll focus on is the short circuit current (ISC). The ISC (measured in amperes), when under perfect conditions, is the highest current that the solar panel can produce. Normally, this number is used to calculate the capacity of the charge controller required for the electrical system, but in this case, we'll use the ISC to get a general idea of performance. ISC requires a literal short circuit, a connection of the solar panels' positive and negative leads. To measure current, we used an Extech Instruments EX623 AC/DC clamp meter. Since there is no resistance in this short circuit, these values will be higher than you would see in a typical electrical system.

I selected a range of rigid, flexible, and portable panels closest to the 100-watt rating. When talking about output or performance, I'll make apple-to-apple comparisons per rated watt. Along with the output per rated watt, the output per rated watt per pound will be considered. Payload capacity is an essential consideration in any overland vehicle build; solar panels are a compoent of that payload. It should be noted that Renogy was invited to participate in the review but did not respond. The test was conducted in Calgary, Alberta, in July 2022.

Opening page: The Samlex America 100-watt panel has been put to good use on our truck, parked here on the west coast of Baja California Sur.



From left: Redarc Electronics, Samlex America, Zamp Solar

Rigid solar panels have become the benchmark in the solar panel industry. Their robust construction provides peace of mind that when installed on the roof of your truck or camper, it will withstand intense heat from the sun, extreme cold on clear winter days, 80 mph winds on the highway, scrapes by low-hanging branches, hail storms, and vibration from hundreds of miles of washboard roads. The tempered glass, corrosion-resistant aluminum, and sturdy installation brackets used by most manufacturers mean that you can usually set it and forget it. Once the panels are installed, they can provide worry-free service for years to come with zero maintenance—other than the occasional cleaning. Typically, they're less expensive than flexible or portable models.

In the past, rigid panels generally provided higher efficiencies than flexible ones, especially when comparing them to glued or taped-on flexible panels, which have a substantial increase in temperature throughout the day.

Unfortunately, all of these positive attributes do come at a price. Rigid panels have larger dimensions (especially the thickness) and are heavier than their flexible counterparts. Mounting rigid panels can also be more difficult since they require a roof rack or mounting of the panels directly to the roof, requiring drilling and bolting.

REDARC ELECTRONICS

120-WATT MONOCRYSTALLINE SOLAR PANEL (SMSP1120)

Born in the Australian Outback, Redarc has been designing and building automotive electronics for over 40 years. Their range of products includes in-vehicle battery chargers, inverters, electronic brake controllers, vehicle electronic management systems, and an assortment of solar panels. With 15 percent of every sale going back into research and development, Redarc promises to continuously evolve.

This panel looks and feels like many others I have used in the past, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Compared to many panels in this test, the Redarc is heavy, and the profile is fairly thick, but the confidence provided by the traditional construction methods is well worth noting. The robust aluminum-framed and tempered-glass-coated 120-watt monocrystalline flat panel will surely withstand severe road and weather conditions as intended. With standard MC4 connectors, these panels can be connected to most standard camper solar wiring.

PROS
Classic construction with sturdy aluminum frame
Company pedigree

CONS
Heavy

Affordability combined with mid-range performance in testing makes it a good value. It's hard to find fault with the Redarc as it works as intended at a reasonable price point, with a company that has decades of experience backing it. If you have the payload capacity available, I expect you could mount these on the roof of your vehicle and forget about them for years to come.

$385 | REDARCELECTRONICS.COM

SAMLEX AMERICA

100-WATT MONOCRYSTALLINE SOLAR PANEL (SSP-100)

OVERLAND JOURNAL VALUE AWARD

In 1991, Earl Berg founded Samlex America with the goal of providing the ability to power household appliances anywhere in the world, even off the normal electrical grid. Samlex now sells products to over 90 countries. Originally, these products were aimed solely at the commercial and industrial market, but in 2009, they launched a recreational power program focusing on the needs of the marine, RV, and off-road markets.

Samlex has focused on creating a robust product that is resistant to the harsh elements solar panels are exposed to on a daily basis. The monocrystalline cells are protected by tempered glass and mounted via an anodized aluminum frame. This one utilizes standard MC4 connectors. The Samlex solar panel is slightly heavier than the Redarc monocrystalline counterpart, but it performed at a higher level both in amps-per-rated watt and amps per pound, and is now a more affordable option.

PROS
Good value
Reliable (based on years of personal use)

CONS
Heaviest rigid panel tested

Unlike many panels in this test, I can speak to their long-term use as I have had various Samlex solar panels on the roof of my 1990 Toyota Pickup since 2013 (including a pair of these 100-watt panels currently installed). After countless kilometers of washboard roads and plenty of interactions with low-hanging tree branches, I haven't encountered a single issue to date.

$256 | SAMLEXAMERICA.COM

ZAMP SOLAR

100-WATT OBSIDIAN SERIES SOLAR PANEL (ZSK1006)

OVERLAND JOURNAL EDITOR'S CHOICE

Oregon-based Zamp Solar has a goal of enabling customers to thrive outdoors. Initially, Zamp imported solar panels from overseas, but in 2015, they moved design and manufacturing to Bend to improve the product and provide local employment.

The Zamp Solar Obsidian Series solar panels are significantly thinner and lighter than traditional rigid panels. With an advertised efficiency rating that rivals standard panels, it appears to have most of the benefits without the compromises. The low-profile design is more aerodynamic than other panels, but more importantly, the thinner construction could make your vehicle just short enough to fit in a shipping container or under short gates. The Obsidian is at least 20 percent lighter than the other rigid panels in this test based on pounds-per-rated watts.

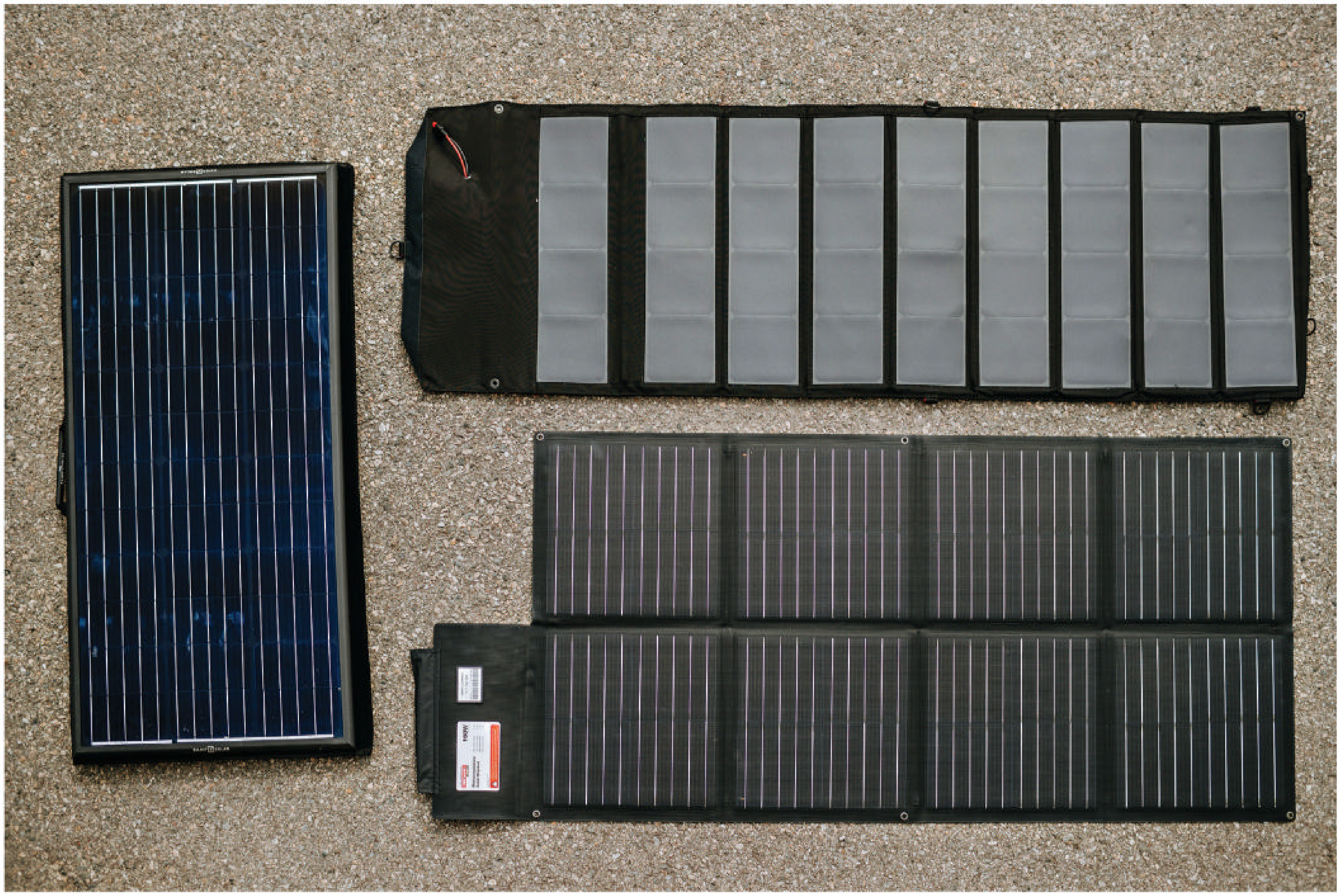
PROS
At least 20 percent lighter than the other rigid panels in the test
Half the thickness of most rigid panels

CONS
Most expensive rigid panel in test
ATP cable connections will likely require adapters to connect to existing wiring

The Zamp 100-watt panel performed right in the middle of the pack in both amps-per-rated watt and amps-per-pound comparisons.

Zamp stands behind its products with a 25-year limited peak power output warranty. If the power output drops below 90 percent of minimum peak power at standard test conditions in the first 10 years or 80 percent within 25 years, they'll repair or replace your panel. Unlike all other models in this test, Zamp utilizes water-resistant ATP connectors. The company does have miscellaneous adapters to suit whichever connector you need.

$500 | ZAMPSOLAR.COM



Clockwise from left: Zamp Solar, Overland Solar, Redarc Electronics

Folding-blanket or suitcase portable models are an excellent option for people who do not want to permanently mount a rigid or flexible panel to their roof. Portable panels also work well for overlanders looking to add additional solar capacity to their current, permanently mounted solar system. A portable panel usually comes with a lengthy cable for positioning directly in and toward the sun. This allows your vehicle to be parked in the cool shade while still harnessing the power of the sun (so you can continue to run your fridge and charge your iPhone).

The biggest downside of the portable solar panel is that it takes up space in the vehicle, and you have to put in work to deploy it. If you have the space and payload capacity, it may be the perfect option.

OVERLAND SOLAR

BUGOUT 130 SOLAR CHARGER (OSBUG01)

Produced in Boise, Idaho, the Overland Solar Bugout 130 has an excellent closed-form factor that could find a home in most vehicles. The double-stitched 1050 denier Cordura and metal D-ring and grommet tie-down points provide a rugged panel capable of withstanding abuse in and out of the vehicle, with the ability to tie it down outside to avoid it taking flight in windy conditions.

The Bugout 130 tested is an unregulated solar panel that can plug directly into a lithium battery pack (such as a Dometic PLB40) or regulated battery management system (think Redarc Manager 30). Alternatively, their charge controller bundle allows the panel to be connected directly to your house or starting battery. The Bugout 130 uses a mini Anderson connection, but Overland Solar has many options to adapt this to whatever connection type you require.

I appreciated the design of the panel with its durable and easy-to-use case. Although the Bugout 130 seemed to have a low amperage per rated watt, it did very well for its weight. I feel the useability and confidence that it can take some abuse outweighs any lack in performance, and that this a portable panel I could see myself taking the time to set up on a regular basis.

PROS
- Well-designed carry case
- Lightweight
- Cost

CONS
- Slightly fewer amps per rated watts than any other panel in the test

$595 | OVERLANDSOLAR.COM

ZAMP SOLAR

100-WATT OBSIDIAN SERIES PORTABLE KIT (USP2004)

PROS
- Self-supporting case allows setup at multiple angles
- Robust case includes a zippered pouch to store optional charge controller and cables

CONS
- Does not pack up small
- Heaviest panel of the test

Zamp has taken their lightweight 100-watt Obsidian Series solar panel and created a portable kit for those who don't want a panel permanently installed on their vehicle. The integrated carrying case serves as an adjustable stand, capable of providing the perfect angle toward the sun at all times. A zippered nylon pocket is large enough to store all necessary charge controllers, cables, and other accessories.

The Obsidian panel itself had good output, but the weight of the panel combined with its rugged carry case meant that this performed the worst when looking at output versus weight. Unfortunately, since the portable kit is based on a rigid panel, it also doesn't fold down to a small size.

It is unlikely you'd choose the Obsidian if you travel in a small vehicle with limited space. But if you have a Sprinter van, RV, or even a small, off-grid tiny home, a couple of these panels would allow you to manually connect them and follow the arc of the sun throughout the day. At night, or when on the move, they could be easily stowed.

$600 | ZAMPSOLAR.COM

REDARC ELECTRONICS

160-WATT SOLAR BLANKET (SMFB1160)

Redarc designed the 160-watt solar blanket to be durable and portable. The ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE) coating helps to resist UV rays and withstand high temperatures, and the non-stick properties keep it cleaner longer. Connection to your electrical system is made via the integrated Anderson SB50 connector and a wide variety of adapters or cable extensions available from Redarc.

This little 160-watt solar blanket is a powerhouse. It packs down to a dense 14.4 x 14.4 x 2.8-inch, 10.5-pound package, but when unfolded is a 64.4 x 29.1-inch panel. Even though this portable panel isn't light, it did well in the amps-per-pound test. When comparing output to the rated watts of the panel, it performed the best throughout the day overall. It's worth noting that the ISC of this panel is 9.5 amps, but the recorded values peaked at 10.55 amps.

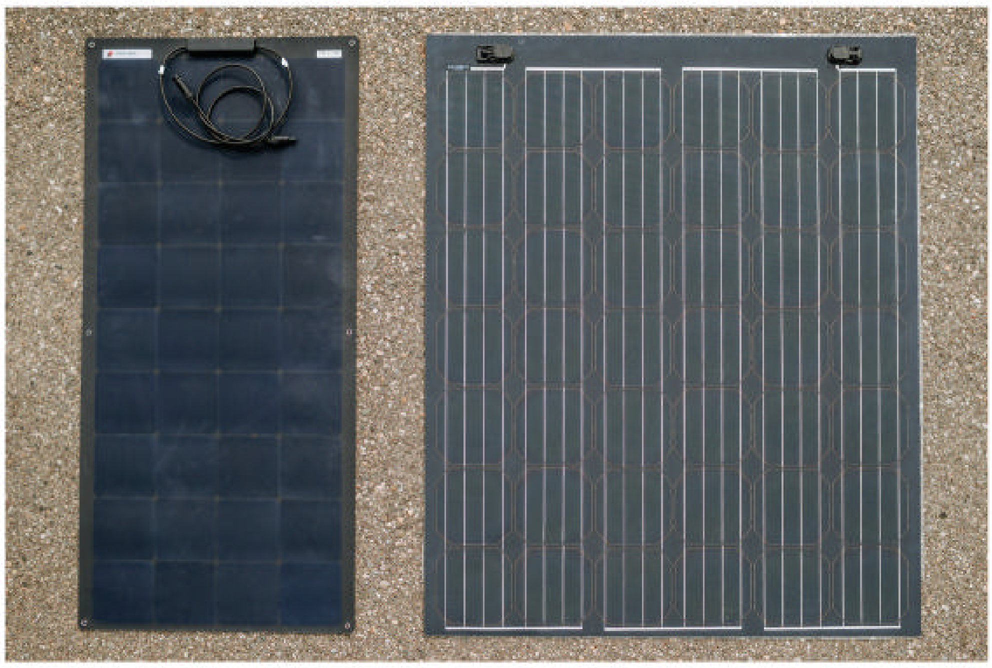
The Redarc solar blanket was only one of two panels that could generate power when half-shaded.

PROS
- Highest amperage output of the test
- Folds down into a small package
- One of only two panels that continued to perform when half-shaded

CONS
- Most expensive panel in the test (even per rated watt)
- Light-duty storage/travel case

Overall, this 160-watt solar blanket performed better than most in the test, but it is also the most expensive. If you're looking for something that is very efficient, packs down to a small size, provides great performance throughout the day (including during shaded moments), and you're not afraid of the price tag, then this could be the ideal product for you.

$1,099 | REDARCELECTRONICS.COM



From left: Overland Solar, Sunflare

Over the last few years, flexible solar panels have become more and more prevalent in the overlanding community. The ease of installation, thin profile, and lightweight design make them a fantastic option for most off-grid campers. Although they are not as resilient as rigid options, flexible panels can still withstand some abuse.

Flexible panels easily mold to curved surfaces (such as an Airstream trailer or SUV roof) and mount with double-sided, high-bond tape or adhesive. It is important to note that most flexible panels need an air gap between the panel and mounting surface. This helps to dissipate heat and extend product life. A panel that is adhered directly to the mounting surface can overheat, causing damage to the panel or the surface it is attached to. Keep in mind that some composite panels used in camper construction today cannot withstand high heat from installed solar panels that do not have the airspace to dissipate heat, potentially causing delamination. Always check with the camper manufacturer to confirm best installation practices.

OVERLAND SOLAR

OVERLANDER 130-WATT ETFE SEMI-FLEXIBLE PANEL

(OSOVR130)

Since 2007, Overland Solar has been providing portable solar panel systems to overlanders, adventurers, and military units around the world. Built in Boise, Idaho, using mostly US-sourced materials, they are designed from the get-go with the end user in mind.

The Overlander 130-watt panel uses a tough ETFE coating that withstands high temperatures; has an essentially self-cleaning, non-adhesive, stain-resistant surface; and is completely permeable by ultraviolet (UV) rays. Overland Solar boasts that this panel is designed for maximum output throughout the day and generates power as soon as there is visible light. Although it didn't perform as well as expected when comparing amps-per-rated watts, this panel was at the top of the pack when weight was included in the calculation.

The thick ETFE-coated panel appears to be significantly more robust than its flexible cousins while being much lighter than any rigid panel on the market. Combined with its very low weight, shallow profile, six tie-down grommets, semi-flexible construction, and great price, it could likely take the place of most rigid and flexible models alike.

PROS

Lightweight, thin profile
Should withstand more abuse than a standard flexible panel

CONS

May require a full roof rack for easiest installation and most efficient output

$377 | OVERLANDSOLAR.COM

SUNFLARE

XPLOR 126-WATT FLEXIBLE SOLAR PANEL (FLEX42-126W)

Sunflare was one of the first companies to mass-produce flexible solar panels. Their offerings can be found on off-grid cabins, homes, commercial roofs, boats, and recreational vehicles. CEO of Sunflare Philip Gao hopes that their mass-produced copper indium gallium selenide (CIGS) thin film will be found on every surface under the sun, decreasing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions while providing inexpensive power worldwide.

Their CIGS cell-by-cell manufacturing process eliminates brittle silicon solar cells. Combined with 3M plastics, this creates a lightweight, flexible panel that should be quite durable. A 25-year warranty shows they stand behind their craftsmanship. Additionally, each cell has bypass diodes. That means that when the panel is shaded, it will still be able to produce power from the cells that are unshaded. As expected, the Xplor performed very well for its weight.

When half-shaded during the test, the Xplor produced about half of the power, proving that the bypass diodes on each cell were doing their job as intended. The panel arrived with double-sided high-bond tape pre-installed. When positioned on the appropriate surface, installation should be straightforward.

PROS

One of only two panels that continued to perform when half-shaded
Installation with supplied double-sided tape is very simple

CONS

Installation may not be possible on composite campers
Almost double the footprint of comparable panels

$550 | SUNFLARESOLAR.COM

CONCLUSIONS

Initially, I expected this test to show obvious differences in solar panel efficiency. After handling, weighing, measuring, moving, and evaluating mounting methods, I realized it was more about finding the right panels for your intended application.

Rigid panels are known for their longevity, but most are fairly heavy. Lightweight, flexible panels can be very easy to install, but if they don't have enough of an air gap between the mounting surface, overheating the panel (or the surface itself) can cause low efficiency or catastrophic damage. Portable models require setup every time you want to use them but allow you to park your vehicle in the shade while still collecting those precious amperes.

There are pros and cons with each of the panels tested, but hopefully, this evaluation will help you figure out which one is best suited to your vehicle and travel style.

VALUE AWARD The Value Award was easy to see from the drop. The Samlex 100-watt monocrystalline rigid panel and Overland Solar 130-watt semi-flexible panels are both priced below $400. Both performed well, but the Samlex presents the better value.

If you're limited on payload and want to keep the overall height of your vehicle as low as possible, all while maintaining the solar performance, the $379 Overland Solar 130-watt semi-flexible panel is worth considering.

The Samlex is a tried and true rigid panel with a pedigree to give you confidence that it can withstand years of abuse. At $256, it was the least expensive panel in the test but one that inspired huge confidence based on its build quality. As mentioned, I have years of personal experience with this model, and I have yet to run into any issues.

EDITOR'S CHOICE(S) AWARD With each panel in the test performing well in optimal conditions, and multiple panel types tested, there were two contenders that stood out.

The Zamp Solar Obsidian Series rigid panels show ingenuity in the field. They are more expensive than other rigid panels, but are also lighter and thinner, all while proving to perform well.

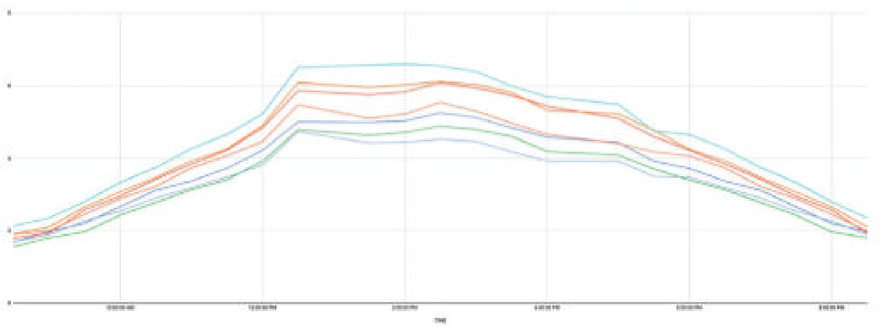
In the past, I wasn't convinced that a portable panel could serve me well, but after using the Overland Solar Bugout 130, I'm starting to change my tune. It's light, comes in an integrated carry case that has a confidence-inspiring handle, strong Velcro closure, a multitude of tie-down grommets, and is small enough to tuck into most vehicle crevices.

I'm currently planning an electrical system for a new composite flatbed pop-up camper, and I found myself specifying the Zamp Obsidian panels to be hard-mounted to the pop-up roof due to their expected durability, low profile, and lightweight design. The Bugout 130 would then be used to temporarily connect to the truck starting battery, allowing it to be topped up, charged if ever unintentionally discharged, or to charge the camper batteries via the Victron Orion-Tr Smart DC-to-DC truck battery to camper battery charger.

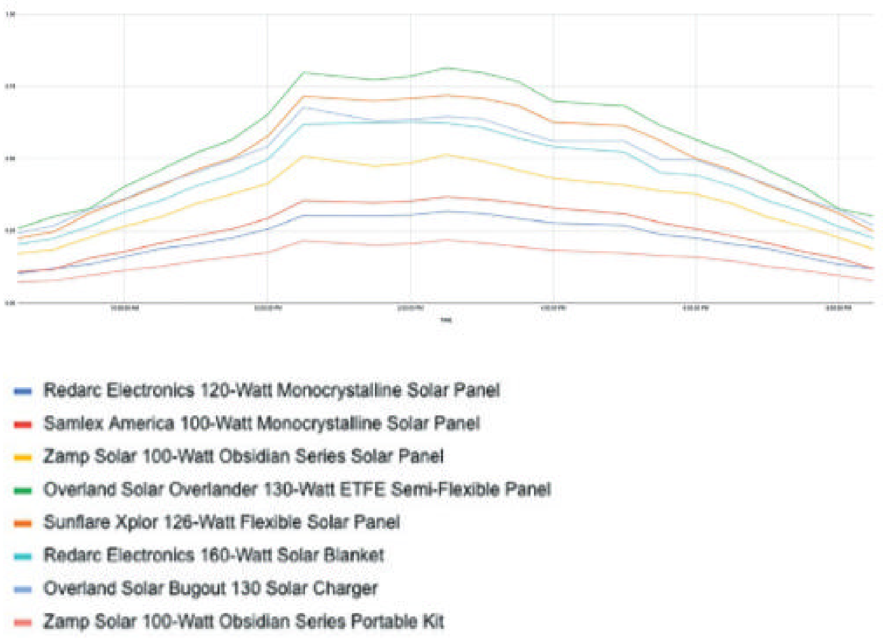
Overall efficiency was a factor when choosing these panels, but the ease of use, expected long-term reliability, form factor, and weight were major considerations.

A testament to the quality options available today, you'd be hard-pressed to find a bad solar panel in the bunch. Each panel's efficiency was high, and the factory support from each of these reputable manufacturers will most likely be stellar. Finding solar panels for your specific application is now easier than ever.

RECORDED AMPS PER RATED 100 WATTS TO COMPARE EFFICIENCIES



RECORDED AMPS PER POUND (ADJUSTED PER RATED 100 WATTS) **TO COMPARE OUTPUT PER POUND**



SOLAR PANEL COMPARISON

MANUFACTURER	REDARC ELECTRONICS	SAMLEX AMERICA	ZAMP SOLAR	OVERLAND SOLAR	ZAMP SOLAR	REDARC ELECTRONICS	OVERLAND SOLAR	SUNFLARE
Model	120-watt monocrystalline panel	100-watt monocrystalline panel	Obsidian 100-watt kit	Bugout 130 (watt) solar charger	Obsidian Series 100-watt portable kit	160-watt blanket	Overlander 130-watt ETFE semi-flexible panel	Xplor 126-watt flexible panel
Part number	SMSP1120	SSP-100-KIT	ZSK1006	OSBUG01	USP2004	SMFB1160	OSOVR130	FLEX42-126W
Price	$385	$256	$500	$595	$600	$1,099	$377	$550
Unit weight as tested (pounds)	16.5	17.63	10.78	7.3	23	11.5	5	8
Measured weight (to closest .5 pound)	16.5	16.5	11	7	25.5	10.5	6	8.5
Unit dimensions (inches)	39.6 x 26.4 x 1.4	47.25 x 21.73 x 1.39	43.6 x 20.7 x 0.67	22 x 7.5 x 3.5 (closed), 68 x 22 x .15 (open)	44.5 x 21.75 x 2 (closed/open)	14.4 x 14.4 x 2.8 (closed), 64.4 x 29.1 x 0.1 (open)	48 x 22 x 0.15	47 x 39 x 0.15
Rated VOC	22.3	21.3	26.15	22	26.15	21.5	26.4	25.5
Rated ISC	6.48	6.07	4.82	7	4.82	9.5	6.37	7.51

YOU'VE GOT OPTIONS!
Patented Cone Brake Structure
Patent #: 6,520,486/7,568,559/7,374,153
COMEUP WINCH

COMEUP USA INC.
Clackamas, OR **TEL:** 503-783-6142 **EMAIL:** info@comeupusa.com
WWW.COMEUPUSA.COM
8 YEAR WARRANTY
ON ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS WITH PRODUCT REGISTRATION

POWER
THE PURSUIT

LiFePO4 PERFORMANCE
The gold standard in lithium chemistry ensures safety and peak performance

12-YEAR WARRANTY
Our industry-leading warranty keeps you covered for the long haul

AMERICAN POWER
Designed, engineered and supported in the US

DRIVEN BY SAFETY, QUALITY AND SERVICE

Discover the difference of Expion360. Providing premium power solutions that allow you the freedom to pursue your most challenging overlanding adventures.

LIFE 10X CYCLE

ENERGY 3X DENSITY

RECOVERY 3X RATE

BATTERY 50% WEIGHT

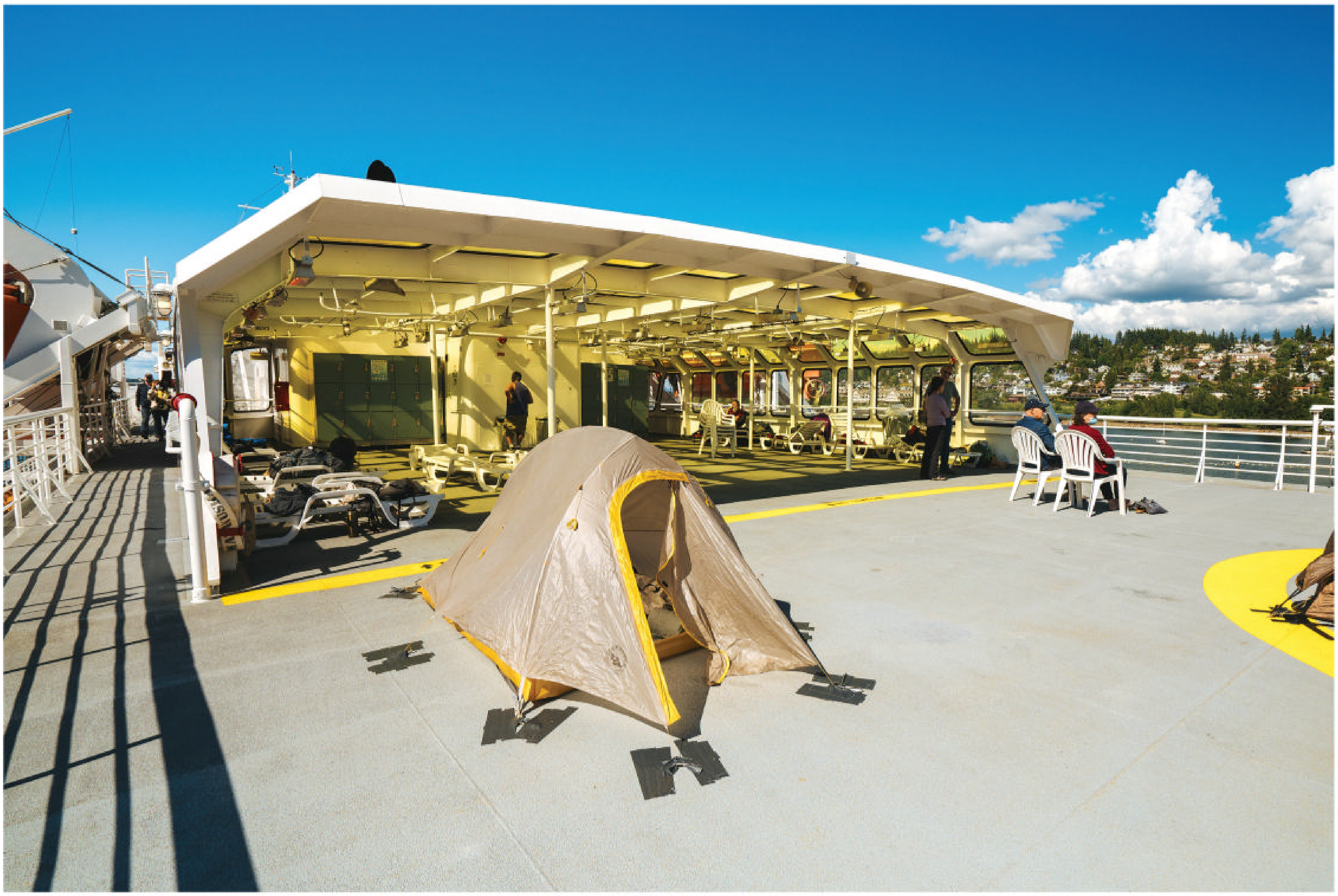
Expion360.com
2025 SW Deerhound Ave
Redmond, OR 97756, USA
(541) 797-6714
Sales@expion360.com

EXPION360®

Lost and Found in Alaska

A couple's fortuitous effort of taking the ferry on the Alaska Marine Highway is rewarded in spades.

By Mary Ashley Krogh



The road has been our home for the last six years. During that time, we've relished getting to know the intimate details of North America through its winding dirt roads and small towns. Like any travelers, we have goals and bucket list destinations that are always sitting in the forefront of our minds. One, in particular, had captivated our imagination for as long as we could point to it on a map and was the last stone we needed to overturn before starting our travels on other continents: Alaska.

Enough was enough. We put the Last Frontier on our schedule for the summer of 2020. I don't need to fill you in on what happened in 2020. Everyone's plans had to be put on the back burner. During that year, we did what we could by venturing into familiar places while always keeping our eyes trained to the north.

As the world started to find a sense of equilibrium at the beginning of 2021, we knew we had to make another attempt at making our way to Alaska. The only problem was that the US and Canadian border was still closed to non-essential travel. However, there was still one way to get there that wouldn't require crossing any borders, the Alaska Marine Highway. Simply put, we needed to take the ferry to Alaska.

With one-way ferry tickets in hand, one for us and one for our rig, Roxanne—a 2019 Toyota Tundra with a flatbed Four Wheel Camper—we pulled into the ferry terminal's queue. The bevy of vehicles in front of us was a showcase of refrigerated trucks, campers of all shapes and sizes, boats on trailers, commuter vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles, and even persons on foot.

People freely walked around waiting to board the ship, including the couple with a camper in front of us. They had an air of experience about them, so I did what I always do, hopping out of our truck to strike up a conversation. They were kind and generous with their knowledge and happily gave us information about the Alaska Marine Highway. While we talked, the man pulled out a backpack and said he planned to board with the walk-on passengers to secure their spot.

The spot he was referencing is something that makes this voyage truly unique. Though there are cabins with basic amenities aboard the ferry for a fee, you don't have to use them. Instead, you can choose to sleep in one of the many lounge areas, on the top deck of the ship on lawn chairs, or in your tent.

Leading up to this trip, I'd done a great deal of research yet was still left wanting more. However, I did find two important pieces of information about alternative sleeping accommodations:

- If camping on deck is what you desire, know that you're in great company. Competition can be stiff when it comes to procuring a space to pitch your tent.
- Do yourself a favor and bring a roll of duct tape so you can adhere your tent to the deck. If not, you stand a chance of losing it overboard in a strong wind.

"Now boarding all walk-on passengers!" A friendly Australian-accented voice announced from the ship's speaker system. I turned and looked back at my new, experienced ferry friend and said, "Well, it sounds like I should join you then."

Loaded down with our tent, sleeping bags, and a fresh roll of duct tape, I waved to Owen—who I left sitting in Roxanne's driver's seat—and made my way toward our ship, the mighty Matanuska.

Eventually, I found the top deck, home to the open-air solarium and assigned tent camping. I quickly freed our tent and duct tape from my pack and got to work setting up our camp.

I usually love our ultralight backpacking tent. However, setting it up by myself in the wind without the tent stakes, which is crucial to its structural integrity, turned into a wrestling match. The deck was so hot from baking in the afternoon sun that it was burning my butt through my pants and melting the usually indestructible tape's adhesive.

Alas, one hour and nearly an entire roll of duct tape later, I managed to adhere our uncooperative tent to the deck just as Owen arrived from around the corner. He came with the rest of the camping gear, having safely tucked our rig into her spot below deck. People drifted by to express their congratulations on getting the tent up successfully. Apparently, onlookers had started to worry about the sweaty lady with the uncooperative tent.

With our temporary home complete, we settled into our lawn chairs to take in our last views of the Lower 48 for the summer. The Matanuska cast off, and our journey north was underway.

Our passage on the Alaska Marine Highway left from Bellingham, Washington, and would carry us nearly 1,000 miles north to Juneau, Alaska. The intricate course is known as the Inside Passage, a narrow network of corridors through the islands on the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America. Most of the land we'd see is completely inaccessible by land.

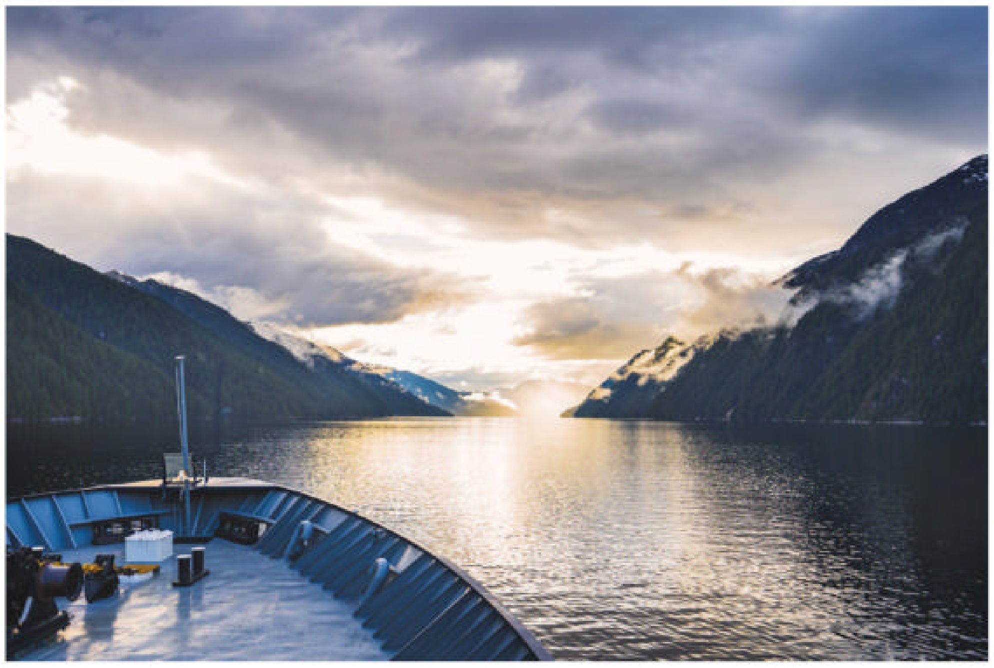
We quickly settled into what would become our routine for the next two days and 12 hours. We moved around the boat but kept our eyes trained on the horizon, taking in the ever-changing landscape. Before we knew it, our stomachs reminded us it was time for dinner.

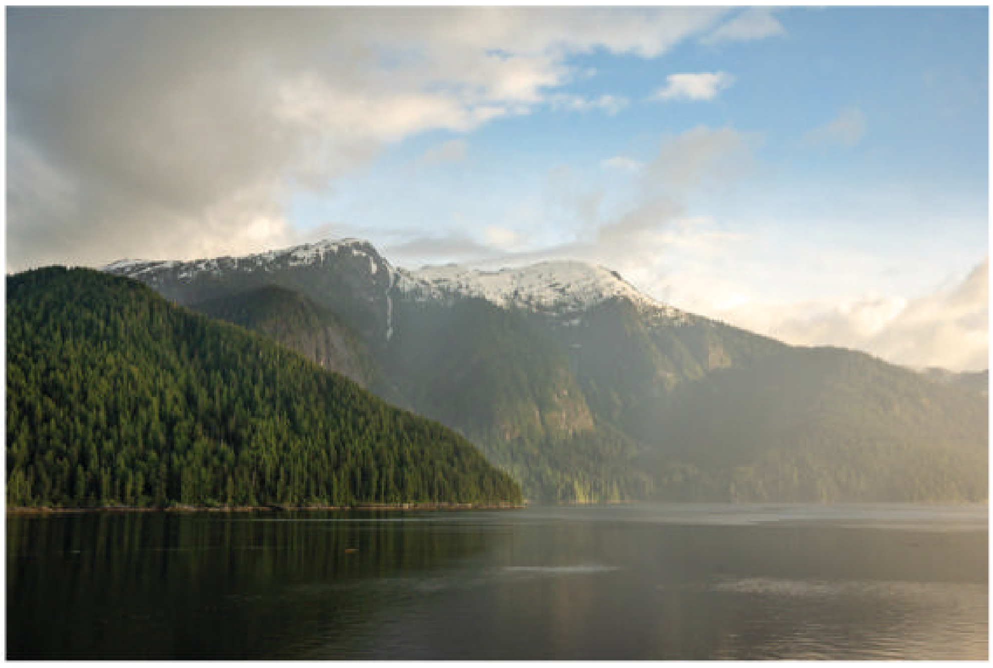
We grabbed the Cup Noodles we had brought and headed down to the cafeteria to eat.

The cafeteria-style restaurant serves three meals a day that cost anywhere from $6 to $15 a portion and vary from pancakes to pizza. They also offered daily specials like locally caught salmon, though we chose the cheapest option: bringing our own food for most of our meals. Even if you don't purchase food from the restaurant, you are still allowed access to a microwave, an ice maker, and hot and cold water on tap. This allowed us to prepare the rudimentary meals we brought with us.

After dinner, we sat in our lawn chairs and watched the light slowly drain from the sky. As the Matanuska drifted through narrow corridors framed by islands—so close you could nearly touch them—an overwhelming sense of contentment washed over us. We'd finally made it. Exhausted from the long and exciting day, we crawled into bed.

Surrounded by other tents, the ubiquitous lights of the solarium, and the purr of the engine deep in the belly of the boat, I didn't expect





The view off the bow of the Matanuska as it navigated a narrow corridor between islands. | Covering some 3,500 miles of coastline, the Alaska Marine Highway provides service to over 30 communities between Bellingham and Dutch Harbor, Alaska. | A brief passing storm gave way to a biblical light show. | **Opposite:** The tape may look excessive, but unpredictable weather conditions can cause tents to fly overboard. | **Opening spread:** I took a moment to watch the sunset from the deck of the ferry somewhere between Bellingham and Ketchikan.

No Smoking

to sleep very well. But the next thing I knew, it was morning. I opened my eyes to find the soft glow of an overcast day. Owen also had an incredible night's sleep. That ended up being the trend for our nights on the ferry. As soon as our heads hit the deck every night, we slept like bricks. The hum of the engine, rocking of the boat, and cool salty night air made for the perfect sleeping conditions.

Owen pressed his way out of the tent, quickly turned back to me, and said, "MAK! You need to see this." I joined him, our still bare feet pressing into the gritty deck. I rubbed my eyes to see a pod of dolphins jumping in the wake of the Matanuska. It felt like we'd somehow woken up inside the pages of a fantasy novel. A light fog partially obscured the tightly packed islands all around us.

> As the Matanuska drifted through narrow corridors framed by islands—so close you could nearly touch them—an overwhelming sense of contentment washed over us.

With instant coffee in hand, made using the hot water from the cafeteria, we settled back into our post under the heat lamps of the solarium to watch the world go by. We struck up conversations with the other travelers that decided to call the top deck home. It was clear that we were a breed all our own: the ones that had chosen to brave the elements rather than the guaranteed comforts of the lounges. Every person we talked to had an interesting story to tell. Some take the ferry north every year, some were returning to relive a journey they took decades ago, and some were military families moving to coastal Alaska. There were also plenty of people, like ourselves, making the pilgrimage for the first time. The one thing that we all had in common was an infectious excitement for what lay ahead. The sense of community on the ferry made it feel special.

Made in the early 1960s, the Matanuska came complete with antiquated charm. We searched for electrical outlets around the 50-year-old ship but only found a handful. The few outlets we did see were in the lounge areas and were permanently occupied by people who'd decided to set up their camp strategically for access to power. Clearly, they had known something we didn't.

We boarded the ferry with a pile of work we'd hoped to get done in the idle hours. We took the lack of plugs, WiFi, and cell service as a sign we should put that work aside—a forced but necessary break that we otherwise wouldn't have given ourselves. Work on the road is both a blessing and a curse.

The Matanuska passed through a rain shower just as the sun was setting. Off the stern, a brilliant double rainbow spanned the tight passage. Off the bow, the setting sun lit up the rain. Seemingly everyone onboard stopped what they were doing to watch the display.

We did our best to stay up until we could see the stars. By 11:00 p.m., the sky was still a warm gradient. It was clear that we were getting close to the Land of the Midnight Sun. With heavy eyes, we called it a night.

At some point in the night, I briefly woke up to the engine's changing rhythm. I later learned that the engines had to be cut off because we reached an area that was too shallow to pass at low tide. After waiting three hours, the tide rose, and we continued on our way.

Coastal Alaska is made up of a temperate rainforest which means that passing storms are all but guaranteed. | This unique method of travel gave us a rare perspective of areas inaccessible by land. | The ferry runs year-round, but in the winter, the passage can be notoriously rough. Thankfully, we had nothing but smooth sailing. | **Opposite:** Blue hour, perfectly contrasting the omnipresent glow of heat lamps in the open-air solarium.

We woke up to full daylight at 4:30 a.m. as the town of Ketchikan came into view. It was our first of a few stops along the way. We had a layover and decided to go ashore to grab some breakfast and stretch our legs.

Back out on the water, the chipper Australian accent reported that the car deck would soon be open for 30 minutes. They opened the otherwise locked deck a few times a day, and we used these opportunities to grab food from the rig or whatever we'd inevitably forgotten the last time. This was also when passengers with pets could go down to check on their animals that were sequestered with their vehicles for the duration of the cruise. These periodic visits were when they'd walk their dogs around the car deck to "go." I heard many frantic pet owners pleading with their furry friends that, for this rare occasion, they were allowed to go to the bathroom on the floor—poor things.

The rest of the day was a blur of short stops in various ports. Instead of getting off in Wrangell, we decided to get in one last shower before arriving at our port of call the following morning. The Matanuska had showers all over the boat and free towels at the bursar's office. Not only were the showers free, but the water was hot and had great pressure, things that any traveler can appreciate.

As our final day on the Alaska Marine Highway came to a close, we decided to release our tent from its duct tape bondage and pack it away for the night. Instead, we converted our lawn chairs into beds and settled into our sleeping bags one last time.

The now-familiar voice on the intercom broke the silence at 4:00 a.m., announcing that we'd soon arrive at the Auke Bay/Juneau ferry terminal. We'd already been up, stuffing our sleeping bags into our packs.

As we watched the lights from Alaska's capital city dance across the water, we wondered what the next three months would look like for us. We had no idea that soon, we'd get dropped into the Kenai Wilderness by a float plane, spend two days watching the bears fish Brooks Falls, trek across multiple glaciers, wander into an ice cave, watch Denali's peak emerge from the clouds for a brief moment, jump into a pool of water on the ice, and surf the bore tide.

You have to go out of your way to get to a place like this, but we had a sneaking suspicion that Alaska rewards those who put in the effort.

VISIT MAK AND OWEN'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL, BOUND FOR NOWHERE, FOR THEIR SERIES ON ALASKA, INCLUDING FOOTAGE ON THE DECKS OF THE MATANUSKA. YOU CAN ALSO FIND THEIR VIDEO OF THE KENAI FJORDS ON EXPEDITION PORTAL.

Clockwise from top right: A sunset view of Mendenhall Glacier, first known to the native Tlingit people as Aak'wtaaksit, the glacier behind the little lake. | A sow and two yearling cubs fishing on the Brooks River in Katmai National Park. | Owen, exploring the inside of an ice cave under Mendenhall Glacier during its brief but beautiful existence. | The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, an expansive volcanic ash flow, as seen from the window of our float plane. | Jumping in for a polar plunge on Root Glacier outside McCarthy, Alaska. | **Opposite:** It was a rare sight to see the port of Ketchikan without a cruise ship as they had yet to return to this part of the world post-pandemic.

It's your adventure.

Bring it.

KINGSTAR®

Exclusive options. Built to order.

DESIGN YOURS: KINGSTAR.NET/ADVENTURE

CALL MARCUS: 480-686-1302

1984 Mercedes-Benz 508D

The devil is in the details for the owners of this Mercedes-Benz 508D named Beelzebus.

By Ashley Giordano
Photography by Katja Smurakova

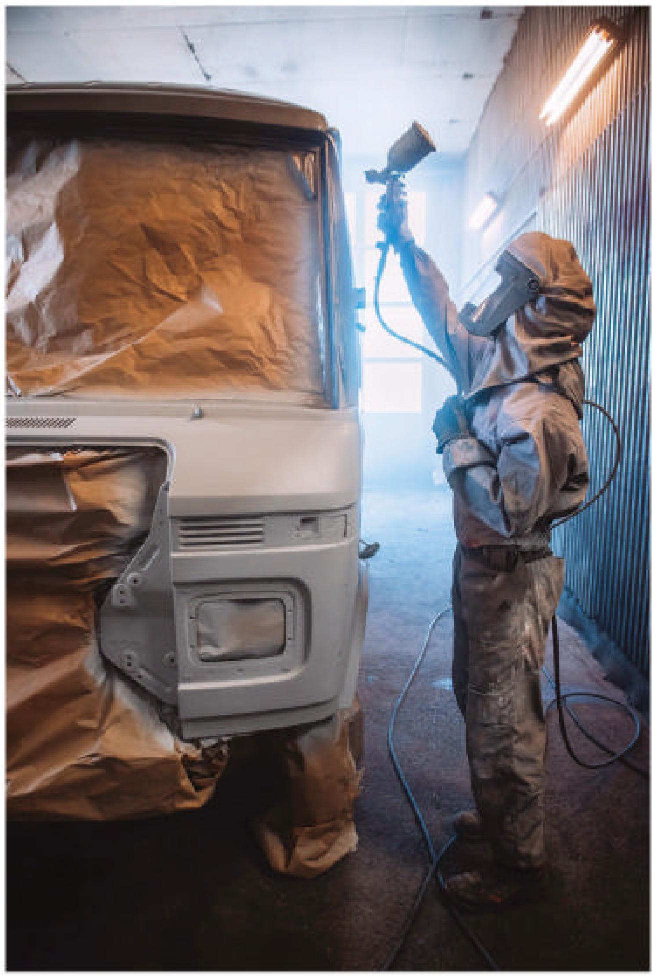
INTRODUCING iKAMPER'S **DIY RTT**

BUILT FOR ADVENTURE. BUILT BY HAND.

- Solo or Duo models
- Side or rear entry configurations
- Full line of compatible accessories
- Reinforced exoshell design
- Strut assistance for cargo up to 100 lbs
- iKamper's most low-profile RTT to date

The newest RTT to the iKamper lineup: the **Blue Dot Voyager**. We're putting innovation directly in your hands with the first RTT you can assemble yourself. The **BDV** was designed for overlanders that want to do it all and carry it all without compromise.

iKamper.com



From left: "If he doesn't know something, he learns it," Katja says of Björn, who learned to weld during the build process. | While Björn's carpentry and electrical skills helped with structural components, working with a small space remained challenging. | A fresh coat of paint resulted in a massive transformation for this 1980s-era bus. | **Opening page:** Beelzebus, a Mercedes 508D bus, emits an infernal fluorescence courtesy of a silicone-encased LED loop.

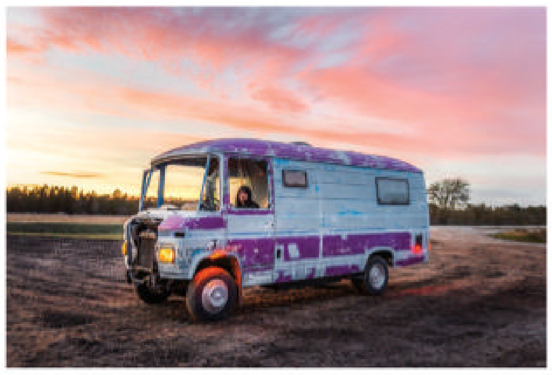
When Björn and Katja sealed the deal on their 1984 Mercedes-Benz 508D bus in 2018, the interior was empty, the exterior was painted fuchsia and cobalt blue, and proper insulation was non-existent. But it lacked the extensive rust they found on other models, elicited the retro look they were going for, and was for sale on their home island of Gotland, Sweden. It was a rare find. As the evening light faded, the couple opted to inspect the bus the next day, excitedly driving their new project vehicle homeward. Days later, they poked around inside, noticing the beginnings of water damage. This led them to the roof. "There was water everywhere," Björn recalled. "It was a catastrophe."

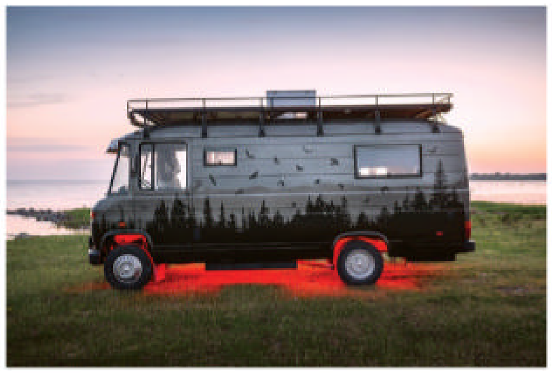
"Beelzebus" is the devilish moniker for this rear-wheel-drive *buss*, which houses an 85-horsepower diesel engine and 5-speed manual transmission. Between 1967 and 1986, Mercedes manufactured the first generation of T2 vans, which were used as fire trucks, army ambulances, and transport or cargo vehicles. The positive attributes which served folks in the '80s, such as the reliable OM314 engine and generously sized cargo area, also made it a suitable platform for Björn and Katja.

When they first traveled throughout Scandinavia, the couple made a few modifications to their daily driver, a Lincoln Navigator, but quickly desired more space. After experiencing bouts of rainy and stormy weather, and with their 185-pound Irish wolfhound, Balthazar, in tow, they began to consider a larger vehicle with indoor living space. "While that was happening, we decided to sell our house and move," Katja says. "We eventually realized, why would we need a house if we could live in a bigger vehicle?"

After perusing a local classifieds app, the couple was drawn to the rounded retro shape and style of the mid-1980's Mercedes buses. At just shy of 6 meters, the length of the vehicle proved beneficial as it prevented extra fees from ferry rides and toll roads. Plus, at 2.1 meters wide, the van was small enough to drive and park on Norway's narrow backroads. It was just about finding one. "When we were looking, there were maybe six or eight for sale in all of Sweden," Katja recollected. "We visited a few on the island, but they were all very, very rusty."

Beelzebus also turned out to be rusty, but Björn and Katja didn't find out until daylight broke after the sale. "[Buying it] wasn't a mistake," Katja says. "But there was a lot of work." At some point in the vehicle's life, the interior had been redone as an RV. Björn, a carpenter and electrician by trade,





The couple chose a forest silhouette wrap in a semi-matte black metallic. The crows add a gothic touch and pay homage to the artwork made by Katatonia, one of their favorite Swedish heavy metal bands.

noticed the lack of proper insulation. That same day, they ripped out the entire interior.

The layout of the Mercedes-Benz 508D platform offered the couple total control to customize the build to their specifications. After lowering the floor, the spacious interior provided enough height for 6-foot-tall Björn and enough space for Balthazar's oversize bed. From the outset, Katja says she and Björn planned the layout with Balthazar in mind. "We made a big space where he could have his bed. We were going to be traveling a lot with changing scenery, and he needed to know he had his own place. Many people let their dogs sleep in the hallway or passage, but he was so big, and it was uncomfortable for him." Another addition included a drop-down table with circular cutouts for Balthazar's food and water bowls, accommodating his tall height.

At 40,000 Swedish *krona* (around $4,300), Björn and Katja admit that the low price allowed more flexibility with the conversion. Plus, because their "veteran" vehicle is over 30 years old, it is tax-exempt and qualifies for enthusiast Old Timer insurance in Sweden, further reducing monthly costs. The total amount spent on the conversion was somewhere in the range of 80,000 to 90,000 krona, which equates to between $8,600 and $9,600 (at the time of writing).

As to the design, they revealed it took hours to plan, a lot of discussions, and testing different layouts to figure out the right fit. "I think we were just kind of winging it," Björn says. "We were sitting there listening to music, talking about stuff, trying it out a little bit. The first thing we tried was a temporary bed and kitchen counter [made] with beams and plywood." The couple drove to Germany in the bus with a prototype of the bed and kitchen. "The bus was [still] pink at that time," Katja laughs.

After six months of full-time blood, sweat, and tears shed by Björn and Katja, Beelzebus was ready for the maiden voyage: a nine-month road trip through Norway and Sweden. Pink paint long gone, the couple coated the exterior in a stormy grey with a black silhouette of conifer trees and flying birds. A Cornett sun visor rounds out the vintage feel and

> DESPITE THE HASSLES THAT COME WITH AN OLDER VEHICLE, KATJA KNOWS IT'S WORTH IT. "YOU GET TO SAVE A CAR THAT COULD HAVE BEEN RETIRED AND SENT TO THE JUNKYARD. NOW, IT'S MORE OR LESS IN MINT CONDITION AND WILL SERVE YOU FOR A LIFETIME."

The bus's interior was designed to accommodate Björn and Katja's much-loved 185-pound Irish wolfhound, Balthazar.

Opposite:

1. The custom steel roof rack is one of Björn's favorite features of the van.
2. With an ample greenhouse, the 1984 Mercedes-Benz 508D offers good visibility and great views.
3. An Auxbeam switch panel mounted to the dashboard controls Beelzebus's lights, fan, and radio.
4. Large breeds typically have shorter lifespans, so Björn and Katja wanted to travel with Balthazar for as long and comfortably as possible.
5. An escape from strong Scandinavian winds, this kitchen is accented with an oak countertop and tiled backsplash.
6. The living area offers the opportunity for work, sharing meals, or lounging on the pull-out couch bed.
7. An indoor shower provides the luxury of a quick rinse via a hose connected to the kitchen sink.
8. Although time-consuming, shaping the spruce paneling to follow the natural curves of the bus was worth the effort.
9. A recent upgrade, this Bob the mini dishwasher features short programs and a UV disinfection feature.
10. Shower curtain rings attach to hooks on the ceiling, creating a tidy interior shower enclosure.

1.

2.

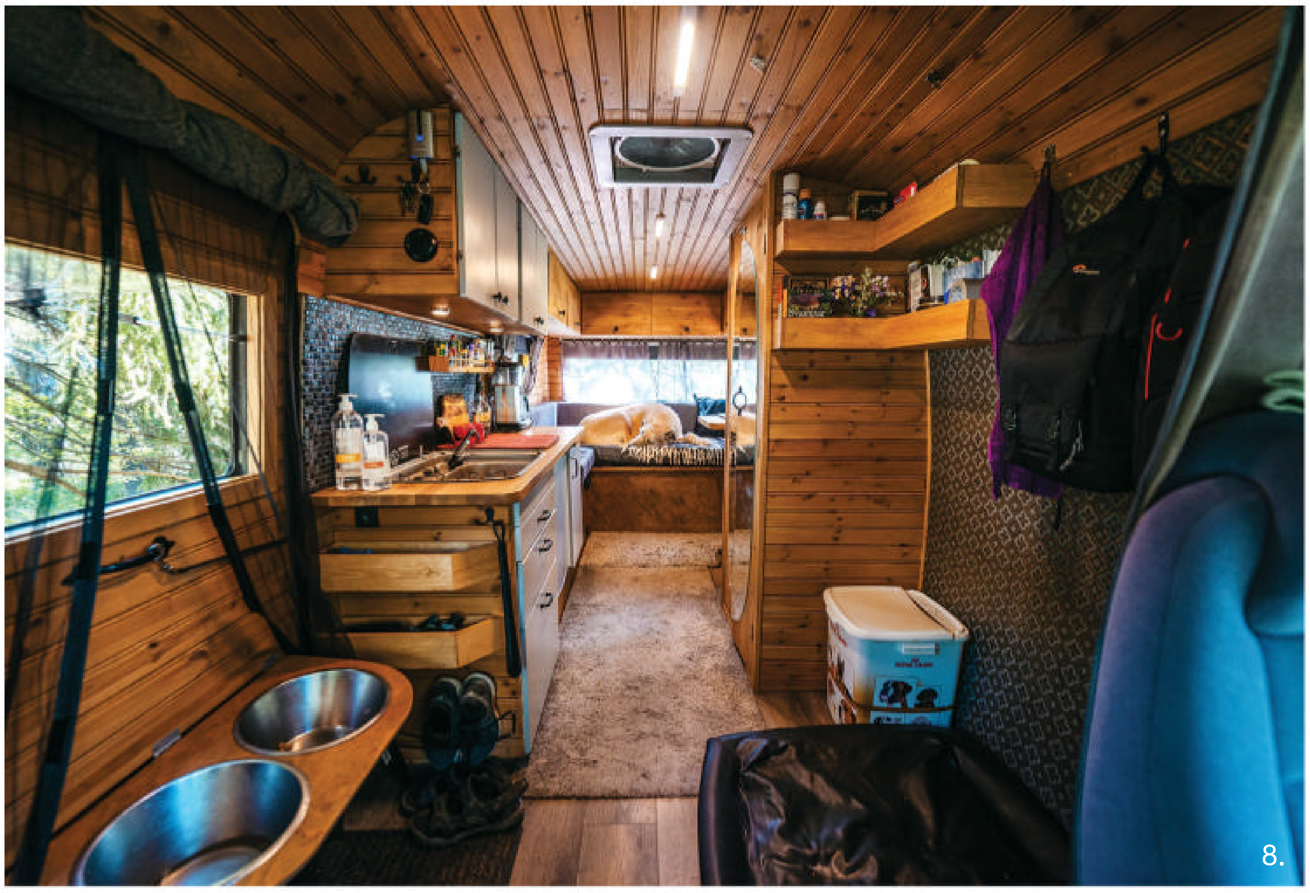
3.

4.

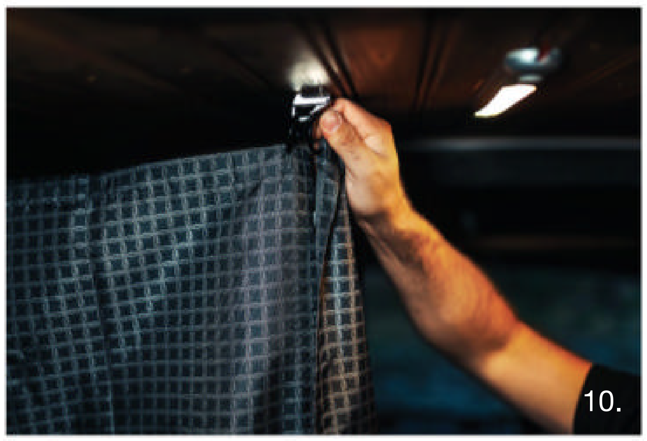
5.

6.

7.


8.

9.


10.

“Living on an island is a very specific kind of life,” Katja reflects. “At some point, the island gets very small.”

accents the sweeping front window, while a custom roof rack (built by Björn) cradles a wooden deck, two aluminum storage boxes for seldomly used outdoor gear, and two 335-watt LG Neon solar panels. “The roof rack is made from regular steel as I didn’t have an aluminum welder at the time,” Björn says. “I had never held a welder before this project, so it was a steep learning curve because thin sheet metal is hard to weld.”

As the van’s stock headlights left much to be desired, the couple affixed two X-Vision Genesis 300-watt LED bars to the roof rack and three 120-watt Seeker LED lights atop the front bumper. As the 508D is without reverse lights, they installed a few lights on the sides and rear of the roof rack. A red LED loop adds ambience and an illuminating glow beneath the bus. The loop, Katja says, “has a silicone casing so it doesn’t get damaged and can withstand stone chips.” The accessory lights have come in handy, especially during short winter days and dark drives in northern Norway.

With plenty of spruce paneling, comfy pillows, and a thick rug running the length of the bus, the interior of Björn and Katja’s build looks like an inviting, cozy cabin. Plants line the dashboard, and a gleaming metallic shifter knob in the shape of a skull adds character to the space. The kitchen was outfitted with a modified Ikea drawer system, which Björn says he would like to fit with a locking mechanism. The bespoke tile mosaic backsplash and oak countertop elevate the space from house to home and are bordered by a Dometic two-burner stovetop and sink, spice rack, and full-size Technivorm Moccamaster coffee maker. These two love their coffee.

Across from the kitchen lies a clothing wardrobe with a full-length mirror, which creates an illusion of increased space. Past the kitchen is a small dinette, pull-out bed, and lots of natural light thanks to three large windows. After using the table for quite some time, the couple says they are ready for a more substantial work and dining surface. A hidden indoor shower is one of the more recent modifications to the build, lying beneath a hatch to the rear of the driver's seat. Water storage includes an 80-liter freshwater tank and 85 liters of greywater.

As Björn and Katja are fans of winter camping, Björn installed a diesel heater. During his initial research, he couldn't decide between the high-end Webasto model or an unbranded, generic one manufactured in China. He wondered if the price difference was really worth it. "We decided, let's try it because the Chinese version we got for $200. We've been using it for two winters in a row and haven't had any problems at all." The ultimate test occurred during their time camped in a valley near Kiruna, the northernmost town in Sweden. "When we woke up in the morning, it was -28°C, which is quite cold, even for Sweden. We still had +20°C inside the bus. So that means it has quite the punch," he says.

The 508D's trunk houses fuel and electrical items such as two 10-pound propane tanks, tools, heavy-duty towing and recovery gear, a Victron MMPT solar charge controller, a 2,000-watt inverter, and two 12-volt Norrack dual-purpose AGM batteries. The solar system helps power electrical components, including interior lights, an 80-liter Sunwind fridge, and an overhead Maxx Air kitchen fan. The couple also carries a gasoline generator, solely used as a backup power source.

After plenty of trips throughout Scandinavia, Björn and Katja have a deep understanding of what makes Beelzebus tick. They also know that older vehicles have a unique set of idiosyncratic challenges and drawbacks. While the OM314 engine has a reputation for reliability, it is also loud and significantly lacks power. "We top out at around 90 kph on a flat highway. We're considering changing the engine or maybe installing a turbo. It's a hard decision, though," Katja says. Compounding the slow speed is weight. With a hefty chassis and sizable water and fuel tanks, the bus weighs 4.5 tons (9,000 pounds) fully loaded and requires a class C driver's license to operate. Katja emphasizes that driving uphill is challenging. "We are afraid that people get annoyed with us," she says.

Obscure vehicles can test one's patience and stretch one's wallet. Fortunately, Björn tells me that Mercedes-Benz offers a parts guarantee which allows owners to order any 508D bus part from the original factory. This usually costs a bit more but provides the reassurance that there is no part you cannot get your hands on. Björn and Katja frequently visited their local Mercedes dealership—buying and special-ordering parts, checking availability in warehouses spanning the globe. "There were two that came from America and took three days to get here," Björn says. Despite the hassles that come with an older vehicle, Katja knows it's worth it. "You get to save a car that could have been retired and sent to the junkyard. Now, it's more or less in mint condition and will serve you for a lifetime."

In the beginning, the idea was to build Beelzebus for a year-long road trip around Sweden, visiting little towns and villages or perhaps finding a piece of land somewhere. This vision was born out of Katja's past. "I was depressed for many years after my mother died in my twenties. At some point, it feels like you wake up in the morning, and it's like you're trapped. I had anxiety that it could be 30 to 40 years later, and my life has passed, and it's been the same the whole time—like *Groundhog Day*." It dawned on them that they enjoyed going to places, staying a little while, and experiencing each area—camping, hiking, or whatever. "It was such a nice feeling," says Katya. "We were happy on the road. Every time we were going on the ferry back to [Gotland], I would sit with tears in my eyes. I didn't want to go back. We eventually realized that we didn't want to stop."

Despite a busy project schedule and the passing of their beloved Balthazar, Björn and Katja haven't stopped. These days, the winds of change continue to blow, with snow-filled winter trips to Fulufjällets National Park, filming their travels in Beelzebus, an upcoming tiny house project, and a new pup named Lou keeping them busy. What else is next for this couple? A rusty 1963 Volvo Laplander L3314 military truck currently sits in their yard, awaiting a monumental transformation.

> "WE WERE HAPPY ON THE ROAD. EVERY TIME WE WERE GOING ON THE FERRY BACK TO [GOTLAND], I WOULD SIT WITH TEARS IN MY EYES. I DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK. WE EVENTUALLY REALIZED THAT WE DIDN'T WANT TO STOP."

SPECIFICATIONS

1984 Mercedes-Benz 508D

POWER
OM314 diesel engine
5-speed manual transmission

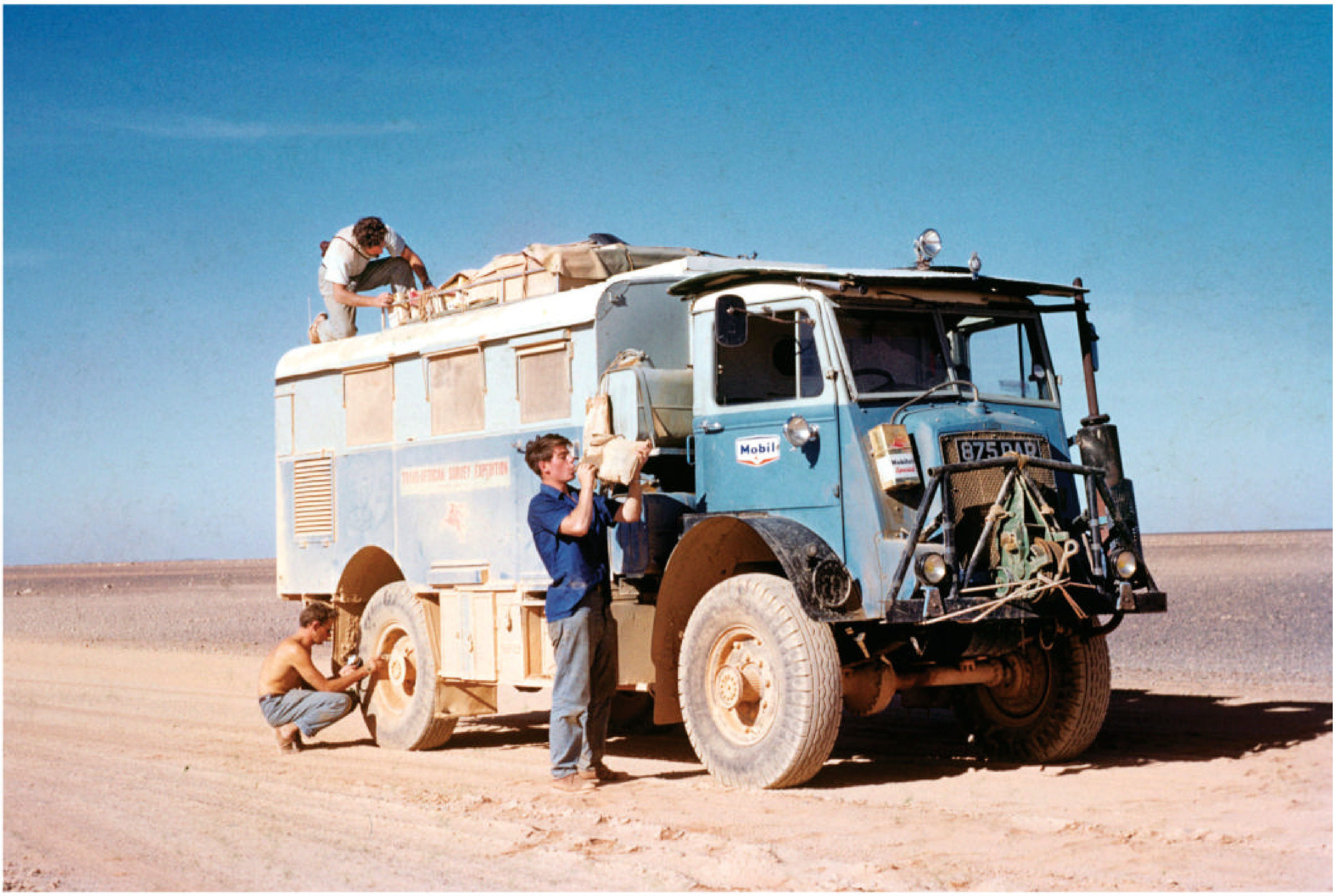
SUSPENSION AND DRIVE
Leaf spring heavy-duty suspension
Rear-wheel drive

WHEELS AND TIRES
Factory steel wheels
Michelin Latitude all-purpose 4x4 7.50R16C tires

RECOVERY AND ARMOR
Front bull bar and rear bumper in progress
MSW Motor Technics 6.124-kilogram winch
MaxTrax MKII black recovery tracks

ACCESSORIES
K&N air filter
Two X-Vision Genesis 300-watt LED bars
Three 120-watt Seeker LED lights
Cornett sun visor
Portable 12-volt compressor
Two LG Neon solar panels, 355 watts each
Two Norrack 250-amp-hour dual-purpose AGM batteries
Ikea drawer system
Aluminum storage boxes
Sunwind 12-volt, 80-liter fridge
Freshwater tank, 80 liters
Greywater tank, 85 liters
Underfloor "hidden" shower
Pioneer AVH-3100 stereo and navigation system
Diesel heater
Bob the mini dishwasher

Calling it an expedition camper is like calling Mount Rushmore a rock.
The 2022 Nimbl Evolution™
nimblvehicles.com
Nimbl
FREEDOM TO ROAM



TRANSAFRICA RETROSPECT

Three friends travel across Africa in 1959 in a Bedford QLR 4WD truck.

SUSPENSION | ARMOR | LIGHTING | RECOVERY | CAMPING | ROOFTOP TENTS | AWNINGS
YOUR ADVENTURE
ELEVATED
SWIFT 1400
RoofTop Tent
XTR-71
270° Awning
TOYOTA
IRONMAN
4 X 4
IRONMAN 4X4
ironman4x4america.com

It's the desert I most remember. Its immensity and utter silence have lingered in my memory over many years. On this, our first night away from humanity, we hiked a short distance from the truck. It appeared so tiny and insignificant, yet it was our home, our lifeline, and our sole means of survival in this harsh yet spellbinding landscape. Overhead, the immensity of the heavens stretched unimpeded to the horizon in every direction, ablaze with stars beyond imagining—an affirmation of infinity. The silence was absolute. The only sounds were our breathing and the ticking of my watch. A pebble, carelessly tossed, shattered the stillness like the smashing of a pane of glass, and then it returned, embracing us like an invisible cloak.

More than 60 years have passed since that memorable moment. There were three of us: Collyn, Rex, and myself. We had met at the de Havilland Aircraft Company in Hatfield, England. Collyn was an electronics engineer while Rex and I were apprentices; we shared an interest in vintage cars and had become friends.

Collyn subsequently left de Havilland to join the research department of Bedford/Vauxhall Motors while I, after my apprenticeship, went to what was then called Southern Rhodesia to become a learner miner. Two years later, in 1959, after I had hitchhiked from Rhodesia to Kenya, I was invited on a journey Collyn had planned to drive from England to South Africa and back with him and Rex. There could only be one response to such an invitation.

It was entirely Collyn who conceived and organised the trip, inspired by the lack of solid data about road conditions across Africa—information sorely needed for realistic testing of vehicles being built for that continent. His employer could not justify financial support for such a venture but made available an unused Bedford QLR 4WD truck for a nominal £100.

Collyn set about researching sponsors for what he called the TransAfrica Survey Expedition. The most vital of these was Mobil Oil, which provided political assistance, and fuel and oil for the entire expedition. The British Army supplied 100 kilograms of experimental dehydrated food that proved excellent.

What I brought to the table was some experience of Africa; a rudimentary knowledge of French, Chilapalapa, and Swahili; plus a small amount of money, which turned out to be rather less than my fellow travellers had hoped. Between us, we had a total of about £550, but decided to keep most of it for emergencies—such as how to get home should the truck break down.

Massive rocks dwarf the truck just north of In Salah. | **Opening page:** Tony takes a swig from a canvas water bag while Collyn checks tire pressures and Rex secures items on the roof rack.

WHILST A FULLY LADEN QL MAKES AN OVERLADEN OXEN-DRAWN TIMBER WAGON SEEM LIKE A FERRARI, EVEN A MINOR GRADIENT WOULD SLOW IT TO WALKING PACE. STILL, GIVEN ENOUGH TIME, A QL COULD VIRTUALLY CLIMB THE SIDE OF A HOUSE.

Collyn and Rex admire the view from the escarpment at the southern edge of the Tademait Plateau. | **Left:** We stop outside the entrance to the city of Kano in Northern Nigeria.

The QL Bedford was designed just prior to WW2 as a versatile off-road military vehicle able to carry three tonnes virtually anywhere. With a fully laden weight of seven tonnes, the QL was powered by a 3.5-litre petrol engine designed in the early 1930s by Chevrolet. This provided a rarely attained (and governed) top speed of 32 mph (about 50 kph). Whilst a fully laden QL makes an overladen oxen-drawn timber wagon seem like a Ferrari, it had a meager bottom gear ratio of 104:1. Even a minor gradient would slow it to walking pace. Still, given enough time, a QL could virtually climb the side of a house. Ours was the rare QLR version. It was built in early 1940 as an emergency aircraft runway control hub but was never used. The QLR had a massive centre-mounted winch, a 12-volt, 600-amp dynamo the size of a large garbage bin, and a giant air compressor. Front and rear axles were driven by separate power shafts from the huge centre-mounted transfer box. The spacious but very heavy metal body was heat-insulated, with opening windows protected by sliding bulletproof shutters. We converted the rear into crude living quarters.

The QLR originally had two 180-litre fuel tanks, and we added three more the same size, plus five 20-litre jerry cans. The resultant 1,000 litres (about 1.2 tonnes) provided a safe 3,500-kilometre range for the Saharan crossings and the ability to cross Europe without refuelling. We carried 700 litres of water (another 700 kilograms). Cooking was via a couple of paraffin-fuelled Tilley pressure stoves. Internal lighting was 12-volt electric.

Apart from preserved food and a large quantity of spares, we also carried a typewriter, letter-headed notepaper, and a selection of rubber stamps with multi-coloured pads to prepare suitable documents for border crossings. The issue date for some of the papers had to be within six months of being presented, which was simply not possible given our anticipated travel time to reach that spot.

I joined Collyn and Rex in Paris, where Collyn picked me up at the Gare du Nord in what seemed to me to be a truly humongous truck painted bright blue. I had never driven anything so large and was a bit startled by the sight of it. Obtaining permission to cross the Sahara involved two months of battling French bureaucracy in the Paris Surrete. Hugely assisted by Mobil Oil's political clout, they eventually relented, and permits were granted, conditional on our driving in Algeria only outside the curfew hours of 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m.

When we reached the heavily fortified border post between Morocco and Algeria, we were immediately directed to an inspection pit where the truck was given a once-over by teams of both police and military. Meanwhile, we were all hustled off to a building where we were thoroughly body searched and our papers examined. The first 100 meters after leaving the post was along a road bordered by barbed wire with a machine gun trained on us for the entire distance. *Welcome to Algeria,* we thought. A curfew was strictly enforced at 4:00 p.m., and we spent every night in a military camp where we shared an evening meal with the French soldiers—a hearty feast served with carafes of red *and* white wine that impressed us, the young lads, to no end.

Our route took us through the beautiful coastal cities of Oran and Algiers, which looked exactly like France to our youthful eyes. Along the roads, we passed toppled power pylons and military Jeeps equipped with a wire-cutting device to protect the occupants from being decapitated by wires strung at head height across the roads. Roadside signs in French proclaimed that Algeria was part of France and it was her right and duty to see it remained so.

We contacted the Mobil office in Algiers, without whose help it would have been extremely difficult (if not downright impossible) to obtain our permits to cross the Sahara.

We finally set off south. The QLR was beginning to run very rough with a considerable loss in power, which could not have happened in a worse place as we started the climb up the rugged Atlas Mountains. We passed notices saying it was forbidden to stop and were overtaken by gigantic Berliet trucks driven by Arab drivers banging on their doors with their fists and shouting *Vite!* Vite! This area was reckoned to be one of the most dangerous in the whole of Algeria. At every bridge was a guard post with an entrance door pockmarked with bullet holes, high up and accessible only by a ladder pulled up after use. In his North country accent, Rex gloomily remarked, “Now I know what a sitting duck feels like.”

Eventually, we reached the high point at 1,200 metres (3,900 feet), where temperatures were only a few degrees above freezing. We set about trying to figure out what was wrong with the engine and concluded that the problem must be internal. We parked in an alley that seemed reasonably secure and removed the cylinder head for the first of what ultimately turned out to be five times. On this occasion, three of the exhaust valves were completely burnt out, with one having a great split. It took hours of work to replace and grind the valves and recut the valve seats. Fortunately, we had the parts and knowledge to diagnose and fix the problem, which would continue to plague us for the rest of the trip.

Not too far south of here, we reached the outskirts of the desert. Just beyond the town of Laghouat, we passed a road sign that read “Capetown 13,000 kilometres.” We were now finally free of security restrictions, and a weight was lifted from our shoulders. Ironically, the great Sahara Desert—covering an area bigger than the contiguous USA and considerably larger than Australia—had become a relatively safe area compared to the settled and developed coastal zones.

At that time, the Sahara was extremely well administered by the French. We had to check in at each oasis settlement or town where our permits were examined. Before continuing, we had to provide an ETA for arrival at the next checkpoint. If we failed to show up within the agreed interval after that time, a search party would be organised to look for us. They would charge for the search, but at least you would be alive to pay for it.

North of the town of In Salah, we crossed the seemingly endless, stony Tademait Plateau, which, after two days of teeth-rattling corrugations, terminated abruptly without any warning. Here we stopped for the night. I slept outside on a camp bed with my head towards the truck, so it was out of sight, and when I awoke the following morning, I was greeted by a magical view over a landscape imbued by the rosy fingers of dawn.

Further south, at an elevation of 1,320 metres (4,330 feet) set in the moonlike Ahaggar Mountains, Tamanrasset is an important oasis city and the capital of Tamanrasset Province of southern Algeria. Built entirely of mud, it has for centuries been the trading centre for camel caravans from Kano, Lake Chad, Agadez, and Zinder, all of which we would visit. It was originally established as a military outpost to guard the trans-Saharan trade routes, and a relaxed but efficient atmosphere remained.

Once past Tamanrasset, the track gradually lost elevation through rocky terrain and

The truck negotiates the rough track just north of Tamanrasset. | Vultures devour road kill in the Sahel. | Tony fills in as barber to Rex after the Sahara crossing.

Clockwise from top right: This bog stuck required digging and the use of a winch while battling swarms of mosquitoes. | In the Sahel, an ox is used to haul water from a desert well. | In Agadez, Niger, a huddle of vehicles waits to head north across the Sahara. | While refuelling in Tamanrasset, many locals seek a lift across the desert. | Collyn refills the radiator in the Sahara.

entered an area of sand where there was no defined track—more a preferred direction of travel delineated by slim posts about 10 kilometres apart. Navigating by compass or the direction of the sun in what you hoped was the correct general direction, the next post could usually be spotted via binoculars from the QLR's handy gun turret when about midway between the two. This was a tricky part of the crossing as it was often necessary to veer to the left or right for several kilometres to skirt soft sand. It was thus vital to remember whether one had veered to the left or the right of the presumed line between the route markers. We still managed to get stuck and had to dig out using our sand mats.

When miles from the nearest oasis town, we would come across small camel caravans crossing our southerly track at right angles. We would always stop at these encounters, and they would often ask for such items as water or maybe matches. These we would supply if we could, and they always gave something in return—perhaps a piece of rock-hard cheese made from camel milk or, on one occasion, an enamel basin of still-warm milk. The unwritten law of the desert was that if you saw another vehicle or person stationary, you would always stop to check on the other party's condition.

In Niger's Agadez, which dates to the 15th and 16th centuries, we saw many Tuareg, a nomadic people of the desert who practice a distinctive brand of Islam. Many make daily prayers to Allah, but strict adherence to other religious requirements is rare. Tuareg men begin wearing a veil at age 25, which conceals the entire face, excluding their eyes. This veil is never removed, even in front of family members. It is believed that men began wearing the dark blue veil to protect their faces from the Sahara sands. Tuareg women are not veiled.

The desert gradually morphed into the Sahel, a vast semi-desert area south of the Sahara, stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. We began to see more people and animals even as the condition of the track deteriorated. Driving was arduous, and we worked two-hour shifts. The track would drop abruptly into dry river beds, and after 12 hours of driving, we covered 159 miles at an average speed of 13 mph. Swarms of locusts filled the sky and battered against the windshield. Collyn bitterly complained, "Don't they know this is the main road to Europe!" Obviously, this matter did not figure very highly in the priorities of the locals.

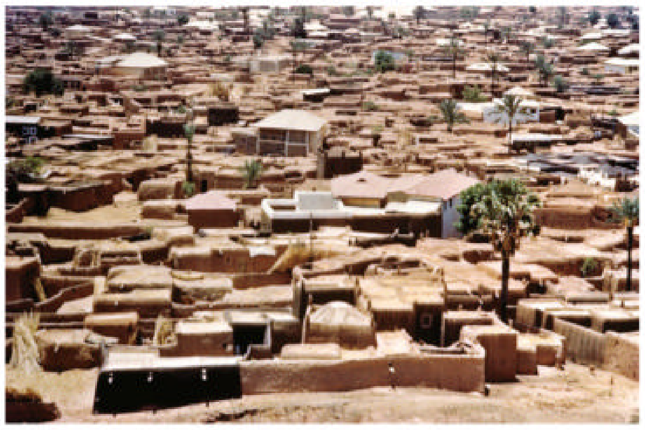
We entered Niger at Zinder and continued on to Kano in Nigeria. After so many miles in French-controlled territory, it was strange to see road signs in English, and we were unsure which side of the road to drive. The procedure was to drive in the middle and then, depending on which country you were in, swerve right or left when meeting oncoming traffic. Crossing borders was a game of chicken: you let the other guy dodge first and then acted accordingly.

Nigeria was within a few months of independence from Britain, so we had to tread carefully when addressing officials to avoid any hint of giving instructions. This turned out to be a serious problem at the Kano Post Office, where we went to collect our mail. We were initially told that there was none for us, but we noticed that the mail, supposedly sorted by addressee's name, was all jumbled up in no order whatsoever. Any comment on our part was taken as unacceptable criticism, which resulted in a total lack of cooperation.

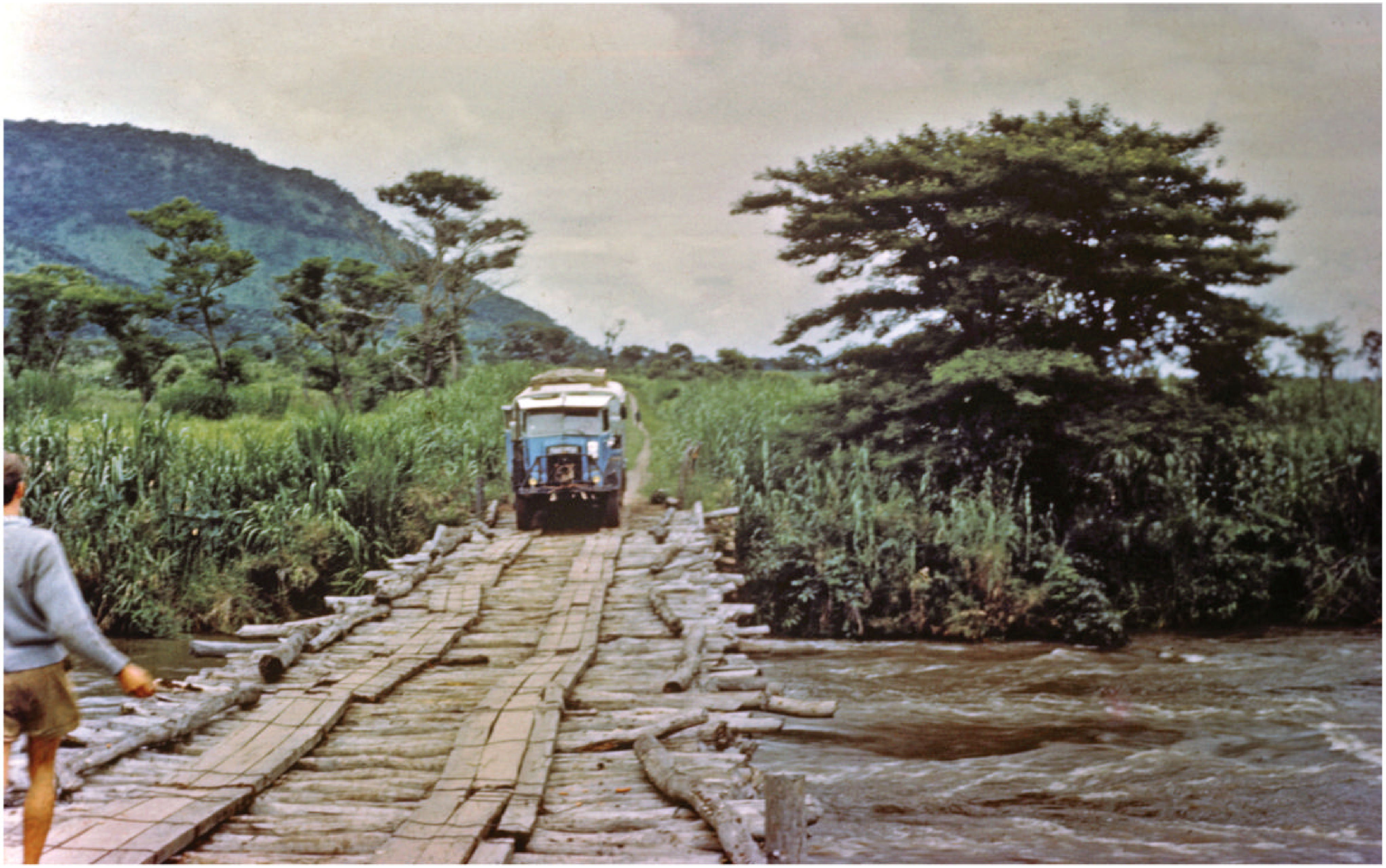
Our map showed a direct road going straight to Fort-Archambault, but when we arrived at the banks of the Logone River, we found no bridge, ferry, or river crossing—just a bunch of unclothed villagers not at all pleased at our presence. We were persuaded to seek an alternative route which led us down a track where the grass was higher than the windshield, and we got stuck in a bog.

Along this unplanned diversion with Collyn at the wheel, Rex and I were riding on the roof rack when we spotted an abrupt dip into a dried river bed directly ahead. As the truck failed to slow down, we realised at the last minute that Collyn had not seen it, and we hung on for dear life. We hit the dip at about 15 mph and everything, including Rex and myself, became airborne, resulting in a total shambles inside the truck. After recriminations and sorting ourselves out, we continued for about a mile when I asked Rex lightheartedly whether we still had a spare wheel. Rex crawled back to take a look and reported it was missing. We turned back and spent more than an hour searching for it in the long grass but never found it. According to Sod's Law, we had our first puncture the following day and were forced to deal with it right there and then. It was very difficult to

DRIVING WAS ARDUOUS, AND WE WORKED TWO-HOUR SHIFTS. THE TRACK WOULD DROP ABRUPTLY INTO DRY RIVER BEDS, AND AFTER 12 HOURS OF DRIVING, WE COVERED 159 MILES AT AN AVERAGE SPEED OF 13 MPH.



Houses are tightly packed in the old town of Kano. | We encounter a camel caravan in the southern Sahara.



BEWARE OF HIPPO

Bridges were extremely dodgy in the southern Congo but to avoid them would mean a detour of at least 1,000 miles. | **Left:** A road sign warns of hippos in Albert National Park. | **Opposite from top:** A near capsize, caused by moving to the edge of the road to avoid a large pothole. | A collaborated effort to break the tire loose from the wheel to repair a puncture the day after we lost the spare wheel.

break the tyre free from the wheel without proper equipment. At one point, the three of us linked arms and simultaneously commenced jumping up and down in unison to try to budge it. That method failed miserably, but we eventually succeeded with the usual hammers and tyre levers.

We encountered many local vehicles broken down along the way, many of which we tried to help. The most serious was a truck with two halves of a broken chassis resting on the ground. We jacked it up, pulled the two halves together with our winch, and fashioned a fishplate to hold the two halves together. We had no power tools, so holes had to be drilled with a "gut-buster" hand drill. The driver was very grateful and gave us two live chickens and some grapefruit and wanted to buy us some beer but the shop was closed.

As we headed south, we began to encounter more rivers. The larger ones were crossed by ferries, two to three boats tied alongside each other and straddled by a platform with a ramp at each end. Other rivers had very dodgy timber bridges. On rare occasions, when a weight limit was shown, it was always much less than the weight of the QLR. We had little choice but to take a chance because a different route would have meant a diversion of over 1,000 miles, and there was no guarantee that other bridges would be any better. Whoever's turn it was to drive took the wheel; one of us would guide the driver while the other stood by with a camera to take pictures of what seemed likely to be a surefire disaster. One bridge was shared with a railway, and we had to make sure no train was coming.

In the Congo, a direct contrast to the desert we had been in a mere four weeks earlier, we were startled on one of our first nights by a series of disturbingly loud, creaking cries, released at ever-closer intervals, culminating in blood-curdling shrieks that sounded exactly like someone being murdered. We were distressed to be in our truck all alone, surrounded by dense jungle in this forest of noise. The alarming sounds turned out to be made by a small animal called a rock hyrax, about the size of a rabbit. Bizarrely, their nearest relative is the elephant.

We also met some Pygmies who lived in the jungle, whose average height was around 5 feet tall. Armed with tiny bows about 2 feet long with the "string" (a flat strip from bamboo) about 8 inches from the bow, their primitive weapons were surprisingly accurate and could hit a cigarette from 20 yards. Select arrows were tipped with poison. The men spoke some Swahili and explained that they tested the poison's strength by nicking a leg so the blood ran down, then put a knife edge below the nick, touching the poison to the blood trail below to see if it coagulated. We were struck by the fact that we would have been at a loss surviving in their world—just as it would have been for them to survive in ours.

As we approached the eastern fringes of the jungle, the road began to climb, and we came across plantations of coffee, papayas, and bananas. In the far distance, we caught glimpses of the snow-covered peaks of the Ruwenzori Mountains (also known as the Mountains of the Moon) which rise to heights of over 4,800 metres (16,000 feet). As we emerged from the jungle, it stretched below us like a vast green carpet reaching the distant horizon. A concrete sign marked the equator at 7,200 feet. The truck was not happy at this elevation and began to misfire and splutter in indignation. After climbing 2,360 metres (7,750 feet), the road descended towards the Great Rift Valley and the Albert National Park, since renamed the Virunga National Park. As we turned a bend in the road, the view stretched out below us, a vast plain with mountains on the far side and, beyond them, barely visible through the mist, the shapes of three volcanoes. To our left, the expanse of Lake Edward (since renamed Lake Rutanzige) stretched into the distance. The valley floor was alive with animals, and through binoculars, we could see elephants, buffalo, zebras, giraffes, and many types of antelopes peacefully grazing on the rich green grass. It was indeed the epitome of a promised land flowing with milk and honey.

We crossed into Northern Rhodesia, which became the independent country of Zambia in 1964. In the town of Kitwe, we stayed with another de Havilland apprentice and his wife, whom we had all known in England. He was working at one of the copper mines for which the area was famous and was able to arrange a tour of one of the mines. Donning hard hats, we took one of the three-story cages to descend to 1,128 metres (3,700 feet) below ground at a rate of 1,800 feet per minute. You couldn't help being aware of the thousands of feet of rock above you, but it really does not matter whether it is 5 feet or 5,000. It is bad news either way if it falls on top of you.

While here, we had to remove the cylinder head yet again to regrind the exhaust valves on the QLR. We had concluded that the ongoing problems might be caused by the cooling system not having a pressurised filler cap. Using a piece of wood and some rubber hose, we concocted a valve based on the Schrader valve principle as used on a bicycle tyre. The overflow was fed into a can fixed to the front of the vehicle, accessible from the cab through the opening windshield. The guy in the passenger seat would reach through and feel the weight of the can from time to time, and when he judged the can to be almost full, we would stop and return the expelled water into the cooling system.

Continuing on, we visited Victoria Falls, double the height of Niagara and a 1/2 kilometre wider, its spray visible from 48 kilometres away. The African name, Mosi-oa-Tunya, translates as "the smoke that thunders," and its majesty was undeniable. Bulawayo, on the border with South Africa, was our farthest point south. The roads in South Africa were considered better than most in Africa and therefore did not meet the definition of our expedition. From here on, we would be traveling north.

A visit to the Kariba Dam over the mighty Zambezi River proved an interesting diversion. The project was still under construction, but the immense lake behind the dam had begun to fill. What had been dubbed Operation Noah was in full swing, rescuing the thousands of animals and reptiles trapped by the rising waters on trees and marooned on temporary islands.

We passed through Tanganyika to Kenya, along a route I had hitchhiked one year ago. I reunited with friends in Mombassa in a buoyant moment and sailed at the yacht club. While there, the British Embassy informed

ON RARE OCCASIONS, WHEN A WEIGHT LIMIT WAS SHOWN ON A BRIDGE, IT WAS ALWAYS MUCH LESS THAN THE WEIGHT OF THE QLR. ONE OF US WOULD GUIDE THE DRIVER WHILE THE OTHER STOOD BY WITH A CAMERA TO TAKE PICTURES OF WHAT SEEMED LIKELY TO BE A SUREFIRE DISASTER.

Rex that his mother was dangerously ill in England. He immediately flew home, leaving Collyn and me to continue the journey. We took the road to Nairobi, continuing north to Nanyuki, right on the equator, to my father's house on the slopes of Mount Kenya with its snow-covered peaks.

We had planned to return north across the Sahara, taking a more westerly route through Timbuktu in Mali. I had always wanted to say I had been to Timbuktu. Unfortunately, the Kano Post Office let us down, and we were unable to receive the requisite permits that had been sent to us c/o Posted Restante in Kano by Mobil in Algiers. This was maddening as we were quite sure the permits were sitting in a stack at the post office. The visas arrived, courtesy of Mobil, who we had contacted for help, on April 22. With the Sahara closing for the summer effective May 1, we left Kano the following day.

Patches of loose sand are a feature of the southern Sahara. | The Ahaggar Mountains are sculpted into bizarre shapes by the desert winds.

We had just made it into the soft sand area in the southern part of the desert when a series of problems with cooling water getting where it definitely shouldn't be caused us to diagnose a blown cylinder head gasket. There was no choice but to remove the cylinder head yet again. We had run out of new head gaskets, which had led to this problem, but we had no choice but to remove the head and see what we could achieve using pre-used gaskets. The conditions were far from ideal. We were in an area of soft sand blown around by a strong wind. In the QLR, the engine was between the seats in the cab, providing some protection from the swirling sand. We selected the least worn of the gaskets, slathered it with compound, and hoped for the best. Fortunately, the fix succeeded, and we breathed again.

Despite the setback in Tamanrasset, we took a diversion into the dramatic Ahaggar mountains and visited the hermitage of Assekrem, built in 1911 by Charles de Foucauld. We had to climb the final distance on foot from where, at 9,000 feet above sea level, there was a wonderful view over the otherworldly mountains with our now-diminutive truck in the valley below.

Back on the Tademaït Plateau, ferocious vibrations caused the top corners of the cab roof to part company with its side supports above the windshield, and one of the tyres developed an alarming bulge. That, along with many other parts starting to protest, such as the leaf springs and shock absorbers, left us in no doubt that the QLR was showing serious wear and tear after 24,000 miles of mostly unsurfaced roads, and we still had North Africa and the whole of Europe to cross.

Fortunately, our stalwart vehicle managed to cover the remaining distance without serious problems—even transiting the Pyrenees and the Alps with snow drifts exceeding the height of the cab. Nearly home, aboard the ferry crossing the English Channel, passengers noticed the map on the side of our vehicle and commented that we were very brave to have set out on such a feat. I just said that we only drove where people lived, and that's the simple truth. We arrived home on June 4, 1960, after a journey of almost 25,000 miles.

More than 60 years have passed since I stood, spellbound, beneath the stars in the Sahara Desert. Looking back, it was a unique and life-altering experience. We were all in our twenties and consequently felt somewhat immortal. Most of the countries we passed through were at the end of the colonial period. Everyone we encountered was friendly and helpful; never at any time did we feel threatened. Our timing was fortuitous. The Congo was granted its independence in June 1960 and blew up on March 26, just 12 weeks after we left it. Since then, almost every country we visited has suffered terrorist attacks of one sort or another, disrupting the lives of ordinary people. I do not believe the same trip could be safely undertaken today, but similar adventures still abound if, perhaps, slightly less ambitious. The important thing is not to be discouraged by thoughts of all the things that could go wrong. It's always easy to come up with a thousand reasons not to do something. Seize the nettle and just do it.

VISIT EXPEDITION PORTAL TO VIEW "1959 CROSSING AFRICA AND THE SAHARA BY TRUCK," A PHOTO MONTAGE OF THE JOURNEY.

FIND ANYWHERE

ALBANIAN ALPS

SLIMLINE II ROOF RACK

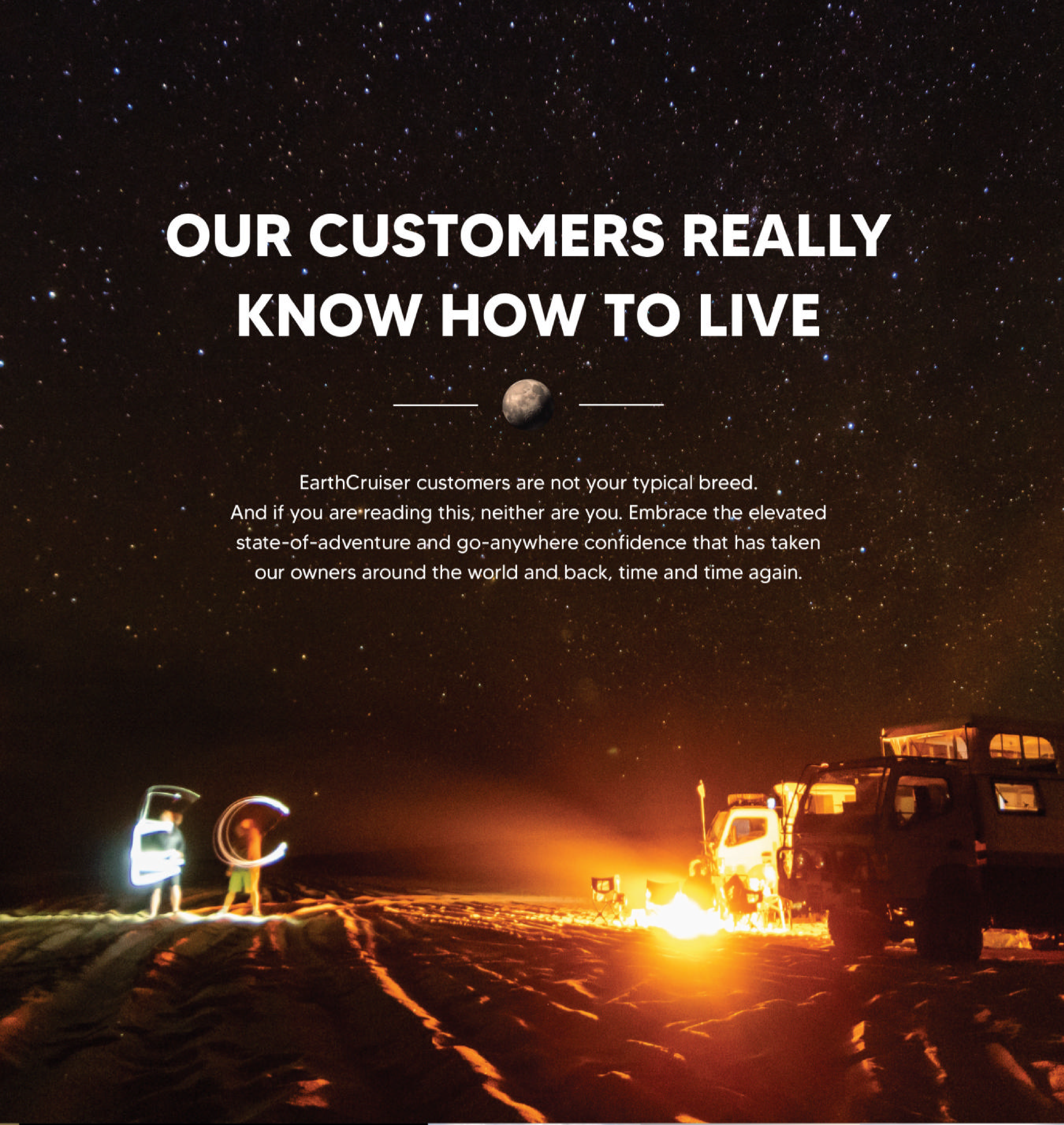
ROOF TOP TENT
GAS BOTTLE HOLDER
WATER TANK & MOUNT
DOUBLE JERRY CAN HOLDER

YOUR JOURNEY CONTINUES WITH
OFF-ROAD TOUGH ADVENTURE GEAR,
SO YOU CAN FIND YOUR ANYWHERE.

#FINDANYWHERE
FRONTRUNNEROUTFITTERS.COM

ROOF RACKS | ACCESSORIES | ADVENTURE GEAR

FRONT RUNNER
DOMETIC

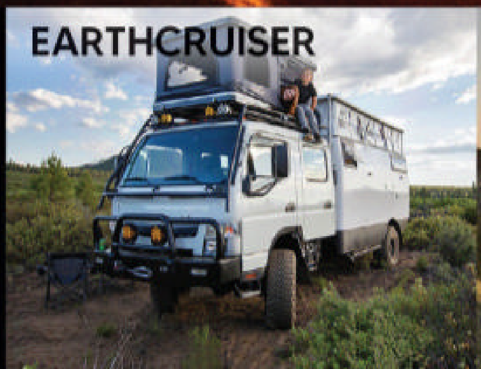


OUR CUSTOMERS REALLY KNOW HOW TO LIVE

EarthCruiser customers are not your typical breed.
And if you are reading this, neither are you. Embrace the elevated
state-of-adventure and go-anywhere confidence that has taken
our owners around the world and back, time and time again.

EARTHCRUISER

GO FURTHER. STAY LONGER.



EARTHCRUISER

EC TERRANOVA

CORE

EXPEDITION OVERLAND'S 2021 TOYOTA TACOMA, "ATIGUN"

HOW CLAY CROFT KEEPS HIS DRAWERS IN TIP-TOP SHAPE.

While Expedition Overland's fleet may not be built for the typical overlander, it is designed for quick and efficient access to production equipment, recovery gear, medical supplies, and everything else a film crew could desire in the field. Atigun, XOverland's 2021 Toyota Tacoma, acts as the team's production headquarters, housing the power sources, charging stations, video, and camera gear necessary to capture that crucial bit of cinematic magic. Atigun serves many other purposes, however, and within its PCOR canopy lies a special drawer containing wrench sets, tape, tools, and more. Curious about which items stood the test of time, I caught up with Founder and Creative Director Clay Croft to learn more about how he keeps the contents of his drawers organized.

GO-TO ITEM My Speed Tools ratcheting wrench set. I have a lot of useful items in my drawers, but without a doubt, this is my go-to item. A comprehensive ratcheting wrench set is essential for making quick adjustments, repairs, and keeping everything on my vehicle tightened to spec while on expedition.

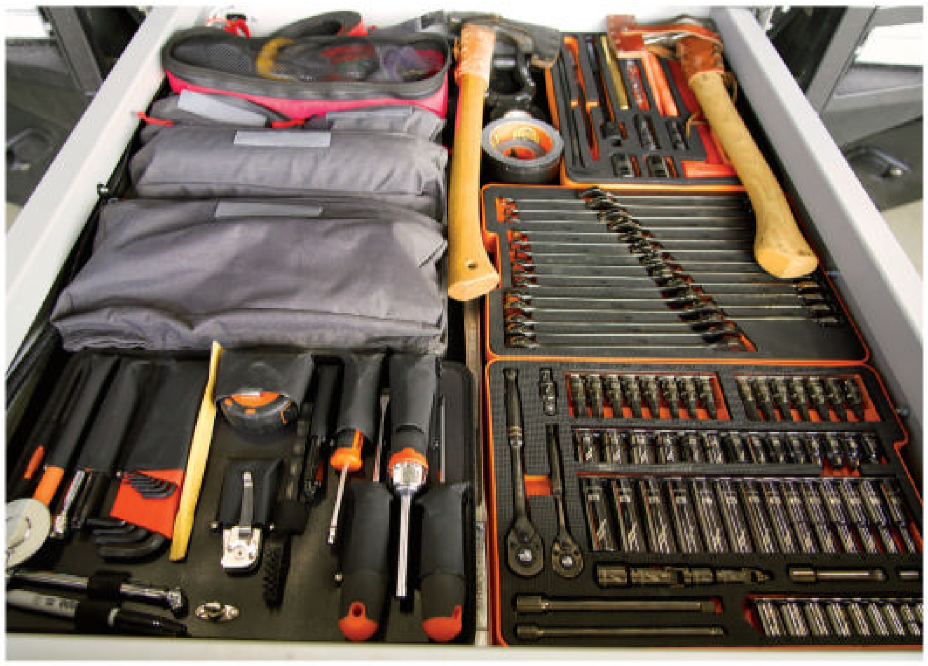
EVERYDAY CARRY A tape kit containing the following items: a large and medium-sized roll of Gorilla tape, electrical tape, 3M adhesive tape, and a roll of Velcro tape.

NEVER USED/LEAST HELPFUL Thanks to many years of experience and a rigorous process of refinement, I am proud to say that I don't have an object in my drawers that falls into this category.

MOST RANDOM A trim tool, used for prying apart trim pieces on a truck and keeping it from getting really scratched. It may come across as random to some, but when you need this tool, *you need it*. I doubt you'll find this tool in a lot of other guys' drawers.

MOST INTERESTING The entire Speed Tools Race Case metric tool set. With this set, I have everything I need to work on a Toyota. I find it interesting from an engineering standpoint that one compressive toolset provides me with everything I need to work on my brand. Given our whole XO fleet consists of Toyotas, this is a win.

JUST IN CASE I pack along an extra Warn Factor 55 shackle. It is a standard operating procedure to have shackles on our vehicles; however, if we need a spare, it's there.

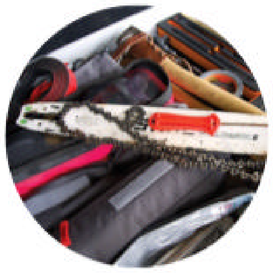


ORDER OR DISORDER I am a fan of keeping my drawers well organized and in good working order. It's the XO way.

DID YOU TIDY YOUR DRAWER BEFORE TAKING THE PICTURE? Yes. We're on our way to Expo West, and everything in my drawers has to look pretty.

BEST STORY BEHIND AN ITEM Definitely the chainsaw repair kit. That was the single piece of mission-critical gear we *didn't* pack before leaving to film our *Return to the Mackenzie* series. Man, did we ever regret not packing that. The upside to the story is that it definitely helped establish a conflict we had to contend with to complete our mission.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU CHANGED YOUR DRAWERS? Somewhere in northern Iceland, but I don't want to talk about that.



An overlander's dream, Atigun's meticulously organized PCOR drawer allows for easy access to several tool sets. | **Right:** XOverland packs a chainsaw repair kit, which includes a spare chain, bar, file, and air filter.

Alu-Cab™
DISTRIBUTED BY
OK4WD
VEHICLE OUTFITTERS SINCE 1979
www.ok4wd.com

Photo by Pytlik&Bak

EVA ZU BECK

"The world belongs to the brave."

Photo by Mike Corey

While filming a documentary on travel in Pakistan, Eva zu Beck was offered the chance to attend a *jirga* near the border with Afghanistan. Accompanied by her host, Eva entered a world rarely seen by tourists, let alone a solo female traveler. Designed to settle disputes, a jirga involves hundreds of tribal members gathering in a circle; but this meeting was different. The men seemed puzzled. *What was this young woman doing here?* Large, loaded guns were dropped into a pile in the middle of the crowd. As she sat down, a bearded man on the other side of the circle pointed to zu Beck aggressively, pointedly speaking in Pashto. Eva tells the story during a TedX Islamabad Women event. "I was pretty anxious by that point and felt I shouldn't be there." After the proceedings ended, all she wanted to do was lock herself in her hotel room and relax. But as she walked away, an elder approached, looking zu Beck directly in the eye before speaking. "Selfie?" he asked, camera in hand.

By thinking outside the box and viewing fear as a muscle to be strengthened, solo female traveler, storyteller, and overlander Eva zu Beck has taken YouTube by storm. She's spent time with a Bedouin family in the Omani desert, seven days horse trekking in Mongolia, two weeks on a cargo ship to the United Arab Emirates, and 24 hours on a cargo train in the Sahara. She completed a 50-mile ultra-marathon in Washington State, survived a snowstorm in Antarctica, and waited out the early stages of the pandemic on the Yemeni island of Socotra. Now, she's swapped her fast-paced travel style for long-term overlanding, tackling the Pan-American Highway in a 2006 Land Rover Defender 110 with her pup, Vilk. "The world belongs to the brave" are the words she lives by—here's how zu Beck made her travel dreams a reality.

Five years ago, you were living what many would consider a very successful, fast-paced lifestyle in London, working for a dynamic start-up, making good money, and were engaged to be married. What made you pause and rethink this trajectory?

I was on what I describe as the 'highway of life.' I graduated, found this great job, and found a boyfriend who became my fiancée. I thought I was doing the right thing, living life the right way, but I never stopped to question whether that was the life I genuinely wanted to live. The veneer started cracking, and I realized I was pretty depressed. I had all this cool and expensive stuff, but I wasn't happy. I [was] struggling mentally and started asking myself why. The more I asked, the more I realized that the life I was living was not my dream—it was someone else's.

How did this realization change your life?

I guess the next big question was, what do I want to do? I threw away the corporate gig, moved out of my apartment, and ended the relationship that wasn't serving me. I was like, *I'm going to travel the world.* It was something I always wanted to do, to tell stories and be creative and create something of my own. Not work for someone else, but to [forge] my own dream. I had no experience making videos or editing and not much experience in social media or travel. I decided to go for it. Five years later, I think it was a good choice.

Did your schooling or previous work experience help with the transition?

I graduated from Oxford Uni—a posh, bougie university—with a degree in French and German language and literature. Then I worked as a creative manager at Culture Trip, a travel media publication start-up. I was their first employee, so it was really at the beginning. When I left, there were 100 people in over three countries, so it grew fast. I worked with creative teams on developing editorial and social media content. There were some similarities, and I was familiar with travel content on YouTube and Instagram, but I had no hands-on experience.

Did you decide to take off or have a calculated travel plan?

There are a couple of things at play here. I want to bring up my grandfather, who passed away when I was seven; he was a really special person. Back in communist Poland, it was very difficult to travel. You couldn't even have your passport at home—you had to keep it at the police station and ask for it if you wanted to leave the country. Money was basically worthless. He had this huge passion for travel and seeing other countries and cultures, and he found ways to create trips for himself and his friends without the internet. They would go to Mexico, China, Kenya. When he came back, he typed travel chronicles that we still have at home in a leatherbound book with pictures and notes. My grandfather was a huge role model to me, and after he passed away, I was inspired not just to travel but to create something I could leave behind for people to watch and enjoy and maybe be inspired themselves.

Photo by Nick Hernandez

Summiting Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Americas, began zu Beck's goal of tackling the Seven Summits. | Eva interviews women of Pakistan's Kutchi Koli community, who continue ancient tattooing traditions. | **Opposite:** Eva rides the world's longest train, which transports iron ore across the Sahara to Nouadhibou, Mauritania. | **Opening page:** "Converting Odyssey has allowed me to slow down, have a continuous journey, and most importantly, to feel free."

Middle: Photo by Kaiwan Shaban | Right: Photo by Robert Pljuscec

Middle: Photo by Eric Matt | Right: Photo by Pytlik&Bak

Clockwise from top left: Eva completes her expedition to Mount Vinson, Antarctica's tallest peak, after a grueling snowstorm. | Visiting bazaars, the abandoned palace of Saddam Hussein, and mountain monasteries bursting with history in Iraqi Kurdistan. | Prior to an Alu-Cab conversion, zu Beck's Defender 110 was equipped with a Front Runner rooftop tent. | Eva recently launched a new YouTube channel called Unplugged, which explores living life on our own terms. | A new addition to the family, Vilk is a German shepherd whose name means wolf in Polish. | "Something I treasure as a female traveler is access to deeper interactions than if I was a [male]."

There weren't many solo female travelers capturing off-the-beaten-path travel content on YouTube at that time, correct?

I always wanted to travel to off-the-beaten-path places because I traveled a lot as a kid and a teenager. My dad lived in Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore, and China), so I would travel to see him. When I entered the world of YouTube, I quickly realized there weren't many women at that time [capturing] that style of travel. I was like, *Why not?* Is it because people don't want to see it? Is it because nobody has done it yet? I thought, *This is exactly what I want to do. Maybe people do want to watch it, and maybe there will be other women who will do it.* It was a niche that I was interested in, and I ended up jumping into it because I thought there wasn't enough representation of women in the adventure space.

How do you move past the fear of visiting places off the main tourist track?

One of the most common questions I am asked is, 'How do you stay safe?' People ask, 'Isn't it dangerous for you to be alone? Why don't you get yourself a boyfriend to travel [with]?' A lot of people assume that I travel with an entire team who films for me and kind of guards me. This isn't true. I see fear, not as something extraordinary or something special. I believe we don't get to experience fear or uncertainty enough. People have this fear of fear. Fear can help us build resilience, become stronger, and seek out new experiences. It never disappears, but your threshold or tolerance for it increases.

One of my wildest experiences happened at the beginning of the pandemic. I got stuck on Socotra island in Yemen—willingly, I suppose, but in the early days, nobody knew what was happening, and I had nowhere to go. I decided to stay, which was one of the scariest decisions of my life, knowing I would be on this island in Yemen with no comforts or luxuries and not knowing when I would be able to return or go anywhere else. I ended up staying for three months; it was the most transformative time of my life. You don't need to lock yourself up on a desert island for three months to experience fear, but it's great to take risks sometimes. It helps us get out of our comfort zones.

How did that time on Socotra change your life?

You start to live very simply being on an island like that. You can't get things like Nutella or Fanta, so you [have] to be comfortable with whatever you have. I learned to ride a motorbike there. I lived outside every day, camping or sleeping on the beach. The world was going into chaos, with everything shutting down, and nobody knew what was happening. I watched on social media and television, almost as an outsider. I started meditating and running a lot more, and I think the trip to Socotra helped me become levelheaded and calm about everything. It gave me confidence that you will always make it out no matter where you are.

You didn't have editing or filming experience before creating your first YouTube series. How did you begin documenting your travels?

I filmed my first video in my hometown in Poland, so I started local[ly]. It's easy to get bogged down by this idea that to start creating, we must go somewhere far away, exotic, and very different, but the reality is that you just have to start. I learned how to edit videos from the so-called YouTube University for free. Those resources are available to everybody. There was no excuse for me not to give it at least a shot. Nepal was my second destination.

You filmed quite a few videos in Pakistan. Was that intentional, or did you choose the location and wing it?

It was a complete coincidence. Pakistan is a huge part of my story, and I ended up spending a year traveling across the country. I was invited by a friend of mine who happened to work at an NGO in Pakistan. She sent me an image and was like, 'Come over! You're traveling all around the world but won't come to Pakistan.' I thought, *Pakistan—that sounds terrifying. I don't think I want to go to Pakistan.* [My friend] sent me pictures of places in Pakistan that I had no idea existed and were so beautiful. I agreed to come for a couple of weeks. During that time, I saw some of the mountains and country. But on the last day of my trip, I went to a party and met someone I fell in love with. After a couple of months, I returned to Pakistan to date this guy and ended up staying for about a year traveling around the country, developing friendships, and making videos.

At that time, there wasn't much travel content about Pakistan on YouTube; it just so happened that I was one of the first, which meant that people were suddenly intrigued by this place that they never thought was quite so epic. It was a total coincidence, but it ended up being very helpful in getting my videos out there to a wider audience. The videos went viral a bunch of times, and I found myself in various magazines and newspapers, including the notorious *Daily Mail* in the United Kingdom. You do not want to find yourself in the *Daily Mail* [laughs], and I was in it twice.

You returned to Pakistan recently. What was the difference between the first trips and the most recent one? Had you changed by this point? Had the country changed? What was the experience like years later?

Coming back to Pakistan after two or three years of being away made me realize how much I changed as a person and creator. When I was starting, I wanted to create beautiful, positive content. I was looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses; I was just excited and maybe a little bit naïve. I don't mean that in a negative sense. The more I travel, the more I realize there's nuance in everything. As the content grows, I have a deeper responsibility to be more comprehensive about how I talk about things—more honest and transparent. I used to either not notice or be quite scared of [not] say[ing] things that weren't positive and bubbly all the time.

When I returned to Pakistan, I realized how much I had changed. That is part of the beauty of travel—the road and the journey change you. Maybe that's something that comes with turning 30. Around this time, I realized I didn't want to travel that way anymore, going to a place for a week or two, covering it quickly. It's impossible to get to know a country, culture, or another person in such a short amount of time. I believe it's impossible to tell the story honestly and authentically. I recently came to the conclusion that the only story you can truly tell is your own.

Photo by Crawine, CLE.

MOUNT KILIMANJARO
CONGRATULATIONS
YOU ARE NOW AT
UHURU PEAK TANZANIA 58 AMSL
AFRICA'S HIGHEST POINT
WORLD'S HIGHEST FREE STANDIN
ONE OF WORLD'S LARGEST VO
WORLD HERITAGE AND WONDE

Summitting the highest mountain in Africa: Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.

You have a lot going on. You're creating videos, posting on social media, training for a 50-mile marathon, driving, planning your routes, organizing events, and recently started overlanding with your new puppy, Vilk. From an outsider's perspective, you seem like Superwoman. How do you fit everything into your schedule?

When you put it that way, I'm like, 'Wait, how *do* I do all those things?' Part of it is that I used to do everything by myself. When I started, I didn't have a budget to hire a team. I was filming, editing, and organizing everything by myself, being my accountant, my designer, all of it. I think I was in a state of burnout about two-and-a-half years ago where it was just so much stuff—the pages kept growing, there was an increasing social pressure to keep posting frequently, and people were voicing their opinions on what I was doing. I felt overwhelmed by what I had created. I was meant to be enjoying all this freedom that came with this awesome job I [made] for myself. But instead, I felt like I became a prisoner to public opinion, the weekly posting schedule on YouTube, and constantly [generating] new and exciting travel content. Around then, I decided to start building a small team to help me with everything.

How do you balance experiencing versus capturing?

People have this impression that I'm always sharing everything on social media. But if you think about it, each of my weekly YouTube videos are between 20 and 25 minutes long, so they're only snippets of my life. I never struggle with experiencing versus capturing because when I'm on the road, I'm camping all the time, cooking my meals outside, sitting on the grass. But only a small portion of those experiences make it to social media, and I'm not filming the entire time. I set aside time for filming because I want to make sure that I can still sit down, do some yoga, read a book, or have a cup of tea in silence. So that's not a struggle. Though I can imagine if you're on the road part-time or making weekend trips, you'd have to prioritize. It probably depends on your situation, right?

What surprised you the most about traveling in America?

Well, my first experience was pretty nerve-racking as I was detained [and handcuffed] at the US border. [Editor's note: Eva believes her passport was flagged due to visas from her travels in Iraq and Pakistan]. I was definitely a bit shaken. That was not a warm welcome by any means. But after getting over that, a lot of things strike me as quite surprising about the United States, ranging from the very trivial to the more profound. The diversity of the landscapes and nature is so mind-blowing. The US became one of my favorite countries very, very quickly. But what I really love is seeking out subcultures. One adventure that I have coming up, which I'm incredibly excited about, is going sasquatch hunting for a couple of weeks. You don't get things like that in Europe.

What's the most challenging travel experience you've undertaken?

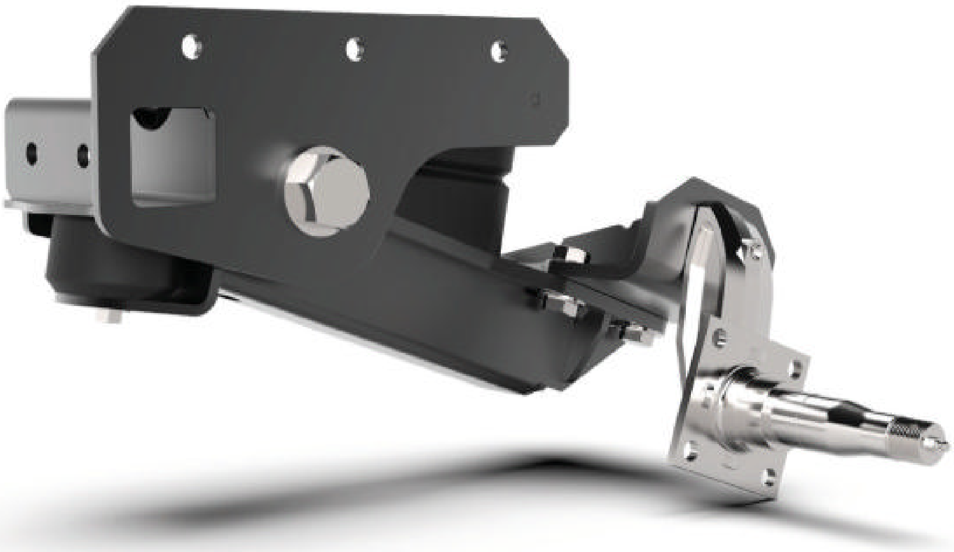
Driving the length of the Pan-American Highway one-and-a-half times was the most difficult because it is a continuous trip,

VISIT EXPEDITION PORTAL TO VIEW ASHLEY GIORDANO'S FEATURE VEHICLE ARTICLE ON EVA ZU BECK'S 2006 LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110, "ODYSSEY."

AXLE-LESS®

TRAILER SUSPENSIONS

With hangers made from heavy-gauge steel to support the increased demands of off-road terrain and a softer Aeon® rubber spring to allows for more suspension travel without compromising strength or capacity. The Axle-Less HD series of trailer suspensions will take you where you want to go and bring you back again.



Better Ride Quality

Progressive Jounce Spring

Quiet Operation

Max Ground Clearance

Easy Installation

TIMBREN.COM

@TIMBREN_INDUSTRIES

HD SUSPENSIONS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR OFF-ROAD

TIMBREN

23ZERO
1862786
MAY 4 2020

DSR 62099
DEFENDER

Photo by Pytlik&Bak

"After driving a Defender, you feel like you've spent a day inside a washing machine—except you come out sweaty and dusty."

not the kind where you would return home for a few weeks and rest, recharge, and go again. This is one long, long journey, seemingly with no end. It's easy for me to get overwhelmed because it's so huge. It's also physically challenging because you're sitting in the car, sometimes for hours on end, setting up camp afresh every day. You have to be self-sufficient, in charge, and manage your camp and routes—all of it.

How does this compare with climbing Mount Vinson, the tallest peak in Antarctica?

During my trip to Antarctica, we got stuck in a storm with -40°C [temperatures and] 60 mph winds. That was incredibly challenging, mentally and physically. Thinking we had to abandon our climb, being extremely cold, and having to pee in such weather isn't easy. But those are just one or two days, and then it clears out, and you can keep going. Whereas with overlanding, you need much more endurance and stamina over the long term to make the lifestyle work for you.

You switched from fast-paced short-term travel to long-term overlanding. Why?

There were times in my life when I would go from Turkey to Afghanistan to Iran to Pakistan—that fast pace is great for a short time, but eventually, it becomes quite draining. [My favorite thing] about all my trips was returning to the same place and seeing it with fresh eyes. I also realized that I liked being in charge of my journey. I craved the freedom that comes with being able to roam anywhere by myself over a longer distance, spending a month in a place I enjoy, and not worrying about the logistics of the next trip. Overlanding is exactly that—an opportunity to live your life on the road, to see the world, and to have experiences from the comfort of your own tiny home on wheels. And the people in the community are absolute treasures. I'm one of those people who kind of fell into it with no experience, so it's been wonderful to see how welcoming people can be to complete newbies like myself.

Your overland platform is a 2006 Land Rover Defender 110, "Odyssey." What does this vehicle mean to you?

The Defender was always a dream car for me. I could have bought a car that would be more comfortable and convenient, and easier to fix. But I don't want a car that is comfortable, convenient, and easy to fix—I want a car that has soul, that I can relate to, that can be my home. That's what the Defender does for me. Converting Odyssey into a tiny little camper has allowed me to slow down, have the sense of a continuous journey, and, most importantly, feel free. Not the most convenient, comfortable choice, but I love her, and that's all that matters. ⊛

PUTCO®

MADE IN USA

PUTCO®
VENTURE TEC™
overland modular cargo system

WHERE ADVENTURES BEGIN

Most Versatile Overlanding Experience

Venture TEC offers the most versatile overlanding rack with the addition of any or all TEC Accessories. Discover more accessories & ways to customize your Venture TEC Rack at **www.putco.com/venturetec**

TENT READY
Mounting Kit Included

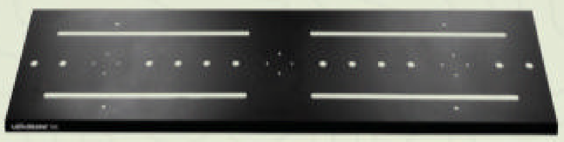
TEC TABLE
with Mounting Arms

TEC MINI TIE DOWNS

TEC GRAB HANDLE

TEC CROSS RAILS
Vehicle specific sizes

TEC MOUNTING PLATE
Sizes: 18" wide



TEC MOUNTING PLATE
Sizes: 54" wide

CALL NOW ! 1-800-247-3974   5701 NE 22nd Street • Des Moines, IA 50313   Email : sales@putco.com   www.putco.com

AUTOHOME®
THE ORIGINAL
PROFESSIONAL GRADE
ROOF TOP TENT

Leader in quality, leader for the range

Since 1958, Autohome has been the go-to company for anyone who wants to get the most out of roof tents: performance, reliability, style, comfort. Genuine masterpieces of design and practicality, they enhance any 4WD. High quality with a wide range to choose from, to find the ideal solution for your sense of adventure. Tough tests by the most demanding users and experts have contributed to the unparalleled success of the range. A pro-active international actor, **AUTOHOME**® designs and manufactures only original models, guaranteed by certification to the highest standards. Because "staying on top" means thinking big.

PREMIUM ROOF TOP TENT
WORLD BEST SELLER
1

WWW.AUTOHOMEUS.COM

AUTOHOME MADE IN ITALY - ® INTERNATIONAL TRADE MARK N°886239

DESTINATIONS | KARIN-MARIJKE VIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY COEN WUBBELS

UZBEKISTAN

Our world is silent and white, covered in hoar frost. The deposits of ice crystals on stems and leaves have turned the desert plants into magical pieces of natural art. We are enveloped in fog, and even though we're parked right next to them, the red mud walls of the crumbling Khorezm fortresses are hard to distinguish. The dreary weather adds to a sense of mystery in the land known today as Uzbekistan, a country with many ruins and remnants of history. They reflect a dynamic and prosperous past, particularly the days when the land lay right in the middle of the Silk Road.

Uzbekistan is one of five "Stan" countries in Central Asia, the others being Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (east), Turkmenistan (south), and Kazakhstan (north). Originally, these lands were primarily inhabited by nomadic groups, although the Uzbeks had the strongest tendency to adhere to an urban lifestyle. Like its neighbors, Uzbekistan was a republic of the Soviet Union, which annexed the country in the 1920s after the Bolsheviks took power. State farms were created in the 1930s, and massive cotton production in the ensuing decades abetted the depletion of water sources necessary for irrigation, ultimately drying up the Aral Sea. On the plus side, literacy during the twentieth century went up to 100 percent.

You can wild camp pretty much wherever you want. When you are camping close to a town or village, chances are you may be invited by a local to share a meal together.

In 1991, Uzbekistan became an independent nation. The main population consists of Uzbeks, followed by Russians, with minorities of neighboring ethnic groups as well as Koreans, Ukrainians, and Crimean Tartars. With the change of presidents in 2016, the country has opened up, and tourism is on the rise. Uzbekistan has much to offer for overlanders. We spent weeks roaming the desert and wild camping in the mountains. In between, we marveled at famous historic sites and sat on a *tapchan* (raised platform) for a traditional meal and a chat with friendly and curious Uzbeks.

VISAS

Visa requirements depend on nationality. For example, European Union members get 30 days upon arrival, while US citizens need a tourist visa. Apply through an Uzbek embassy or online (no letter of invitation is required).

E-visa: *e-visa.gov.uz/main*

Visa regulations: *caravanistan.com/visa/uzbekistan/*

WEATHER/WHEN TO GO

Summers in the Northern Hemisphere are scorching hot. Unless you enjoy traveling in 110°F temperatures in a predominantly shadeless country, pick another season. Climatewise, the most pleasant months are April or May and September or October; however, this also means it's the high season for tourism. If you want to avoid the crowds, go in November or December. You might have cloudy weather and require a winter jacket, but we found the empty streets in otherwise crowded cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva very pleasant. If you'd like to watch the cotton harvest, plan a visit in September or October.

Opposite: The partly restored Kyzyl Kala shows what the Red Fortress once looked like. | **Opening page:** Registan Square was once used for public executions; it's now the tourist hotspot of Uzbekistan.

OVERLANDING

Main roads are asphalted, albeit often potholed and patched up. For unpaved roads and trails, head for the mountains (east) or the desert (west). No four-wheel drive is needed unless you want to try and reach the fringes of the Aral Sea or head deep into the mountains.

Uzbekistan does not require a *carnet de passage.* Upon entry, you get a temporary import document that allows you to stay 90 days per year. The availability of diesel used to be a big problem, but the number of petrol stations selling it is growing. Still, it's best to stay on the safe side, top up when possible, and don't wait until your tank is almost empty. Car rental is possible in the capital, Tashkent, but motorcycle rental is more difficult. Distances are huge, and the country has a good rail infrastructure between cities, so if time is limited, consider driving or cycling one way from Tashkent to Bukhara–Khiva and taking the train (or plane) from Khiva back to Tashkent.

Note that you are not allowed to bring a drone into Uzbekistan.

ACCOMMODATION

You can wild camp pretty much wherever you want. When you are camping close to a town or village, chances are you may be invited by a local to share a meal together. You'll find hostels and Airbnbs in every town, and major cities have upscale (up to 5-star) hotels. *Couchsurfing.com* is a good option when meeting and staying with residents is high on your list.

While Uzbekistan's visa regulations are straightforward, the mandatory registration policy is not. When you stay in accommodations, you will be given a registration slip. Keep them all, as border officials may ask for them, and not having them may result in a fine. For people camping or couchsurfing, there is a registration website (*emehmon.uz/*). However, this policy does not seem to be much enforced anymore, and it remains unclear whether or not having any registration slips may cause a problem. Caravanistan is your best source and includes links to forum threads on the topic.

MONEY

Gone are the days when you had to deal with the black market exchange. For Uzbek *so'm* or *soum,* the local currency, head for an ATM in the main towns. Uzbekistan is still very much a cash-paying country, and while upscale hotels will accept your credit card (Visa more than Mastercard), local restaurants and shops will not. Booking hotels in advance will save you from having to carry large amounts of cash around.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you like interacting with locals, Uzbekistan is a good destination for you. Many people are curious, like to chat with for-

eigners, and are incredibly hospitable (particularly in the Fergana Valley). An invitation to tea may mean a table laid out with snacks and possibly a meal. A gift in return is appreciated, which could be anything from sweet treats, fruit, or something you brought from your country. Tea is an important part of the hospitality ritual and is served first to every guest. It is poured from a pot into a *piala* (small bowl) at just a few sips at a time, so the host has the honor of refilling your bowl often. Accept the tea with your right hand, and don't blow on it when it's hot; instead, gently swirl it in the piala.

It's practical to wear shoes that are easy to slip on and off, as taking off your shoes is expected in people's homes, mosques, and on a tapchan in a restaurant/cafe. Compared to Western countries, Uzbekistan is quite conservative as far as dress is concerned, with the possible exception of Tashkent, where you see shorts and T-shirts—take this into consideration when packing. In mosques, women need to wear a headscarf.

LANGUAGE

Most people speak Uzbek, Russian, or both. Except for people working in the tourism sector, you will come across few English speakers. Note that you may come across the Uzbek language in Latin and Cyrillic script, whereas Russian is always in Cyrillic script. In the Google Translate App, download Uzbek and Russian. Uzbek only works online, but Russian works offline, too.

1. Hello – *As-salaam 'alaykum* (Uzbek), *Zdravstvuyte,* pronounced ZDRAHST-vooy-tyeh (Russian)
2. Thank you – *Rakhmat* (Uzbek), *Spasibo*, pronounced Spah-SEE-buh (Russian)

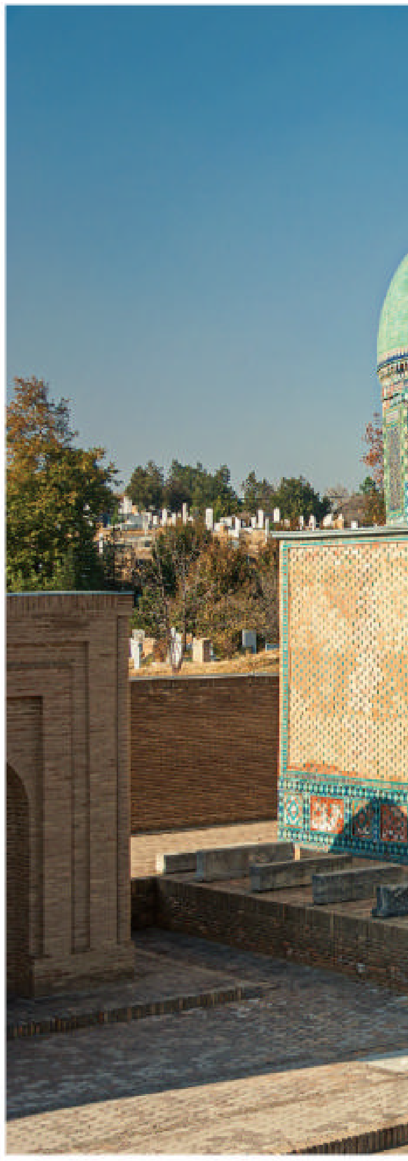
UZBEK PROVERBS

Don't choose a house; choose neighbors.
A word said is a shot fired.

FOOD AND DRINK

Uzbekistan is a meat-eating country. The national dish is *plov,* and on Thursdays, many restaurants serve the oily, rice-based dish consisting of meat, grated carrots, and onion. Some may prepare the meal in front of the restaurant in a *kazan* (type of cauldron) over an open fire. Other popular dishes are *laghman,* a meat-broth soup with noodles and vegetables, and *shurpa,* a soup with fatty chunks of lamb and veggies. Meals are served with round flatbread, which helps to reduce the oil.

Chaikhanas are teahouses where people laze on tapchans, sitting cross-legged around a low center table. It's customary to drink green tea with your meal, which is said to help digestion.



Clockwise from top left: Khiva's walls are best walked on around sunset for a view of the ancient city. | The Shah-i-Zinda complex of mausoleums and other ritual buildings dates back to the 11th century. | We followed tracks across the wide, empty landscapes of the Ugam Chatkal National Park. | A modern dome protects the oldest part of the Fayaz Tepe Buddhist monastery complex and *stupa*. | The ancient doorway gives a glimpse at the heavily decorated madrasahs of Registan Square. | Gold-capped teeth—a common sight in Uzbekistan—are regarded as a symbol of wealth. | The observation deck at the Hazrat Khizr Mosque offers good views of Samarkand.

For a quick snack, try *manti* (steamed dumplings with minced lamb or beef) or *samsa* (baked pastry with onion, minced lamb, potato, or pumpkin when in season). *Obi non* bread deserves your attention; every region has its own style and flavor, depending on the use of butter or fat, raisins, nuts, and sesame or other seeds.

VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN OPTIONS Meat and dairy-free meals are not part of the Uzbek cuisine; you'll depend on salads. In tourist towns, you'll find Italian restaurants. In Tashkent, there will be Korean and Indian restaurants with vegan or vegetarian options. For a vegan plov, find an Eco Cafe, the only vegan restaurant in the country. In every village, town, and city, you'll find a marketplace or bazaar offering a wide variety of nuts and plenty of fruit, particularly melons, pomegranates, apricots, and grapes.

ADVENTURE

In the east lies Tashkent, the capital with a cosmopolitan feel. To get a feeling of the grandeur of the Soviet Union days, spend a day on Tashkent's metro system, regularly exiting to gape at the Soviet architecture in many stations. Or book a room in the most famous state hotel of that era, Hotel Uzbekistan.

Northeast of Tashkent stretches the mountains, where off-pavement tracks and hiking or skiing oppor-

From left: The Shah-i-Zinda complex in Samarkand is visited by religious devotees and tourists alike. | Sample freshly baked obi non at the bread section of the Chorsu Bazaar in Tashkent. | The Kalta Minor in Khiva was planned to be a towering minaret but was never finished.

tunities abound, particularly in Ugam Chatkal National Park. The gorgeous Urunghach Lake may be packed, but we found the trail to Badak Lake to be thankfully absent of people. Southeast of Tashkent lies the Fergana Valley, a region to visit for cultural reasons—check out the production sites of traditional silk and ceramics in Margilan and Rishtan.

West of Tashkent lies Samarkand, which arguably has the most stunning historic sites in the country. You shouldn't miss Registan Square, framed by three *madrasahs* (universities), all gorgeously decorated with mosaics. Our second favorite was the necropolis of Shah-i-Zinda, with its rich collection of decorated tombs. Little visited is the southern region around Termez, which is a must for history buffs interested in checking out the remains of Buddhist sites and Ai-Khanoum (Alexandria on the Oxus), a city believed to have been founded by Alexander the Great. You can combine the trip with visits to national parks along the way.

West of Samarkand lies Bukhara, and farther northwest is the mud-walled fortress of Khiva— they are the typical must-see cities in the country, and rightfully so. Wander through alleys, check out art and history museums, and be blown away by mosques, mausoleums, and minarets, all rich in turquoise-aquamarine mosaics. Both towns have plenty of beautiful handicrafts and textiles for souvenir hunters.

Near Khiva are the remains of some 50 ancient Khorezm fortresses, varying from a heap of mud to beautifully restored structures. You are now in the vast desert that covers all of western Uzbekistan. Explore the interior across unpaved roads and narrow trails, and camp in solitude or stay comfortably at the Ayaz Qala Yurt Camp. As a result of intensive irrigation, the Aral Sea has largely dried up. You'll find the last few boats in the sand in Moynaq, once a seaport but now 95 miles away from the shore. When going in search of the Aral Sea's banks, be properly prepared in terms of water, fuel, and recovery gear, because once out there, you're on your own without cellphone reach.

RESOURCES

DISCOVER UZBEKISTAN *uzbekistan.travel/en/*
CARAVANISTAN *caravanistan.com*
YANDEX *(local version of Uber) go.yandex/*
ONLINE MAPS *maps.me/*
XE CURRENCY CONVERTER *xe.com/apps/*

BOOKS

The Great Game and *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin's Dream of an Empire in Asia,* both by Peter Hopkirk

A Carpet Ride to Khiva, by Chris Aslan

The Silk Roads: A New History of the World, by Peter Frankopan

Bradt's Uzbekistan

Scepter Water Can
LifeSaver Water Tank
Water and Fuel Tank Mount
Led Light Bar
Baja Ladder
Pelican Cargo Case
Solar Panel Mount
Baja Roof Rack with Spy Light System
UNBENDING STRENGTH FOR UNWAVERING CONFIDENCE
LIVE THE ADVENTURE AT: BAJARACK.COM
BajaRack
Adventure Equipment
TM

Specialized Land Rover Accessories Available.
Add even more individuality, style and capability to your Land Rover.
• Running Boards
• Lamp Guards
• Floor Mats
• Roof Racks
• Accessories
• And more!
702.579.0426
JAGUAR
LAND ROVER
LAS VEGAS • JLRLV.COM
Land Rover Las Vegas
Kevin Kesick
Rick Marshell
Richard Ruiz
LAND ROVER TREK '21
TREK

STAY FEARLESS
ABOUT GETTING DIRTY.
GEYSER

GEYSER™

HOT SHOWER
USING 0.8 GALLONS

CLEAN YOURSELF
YOUR GEAR
& DISHES

Our innovative, compact design gives you the power to make the most of every drop of water.

No pressurizing, no bulky water storage, no hassle.

Built-to-last in Montrose, Colorado.

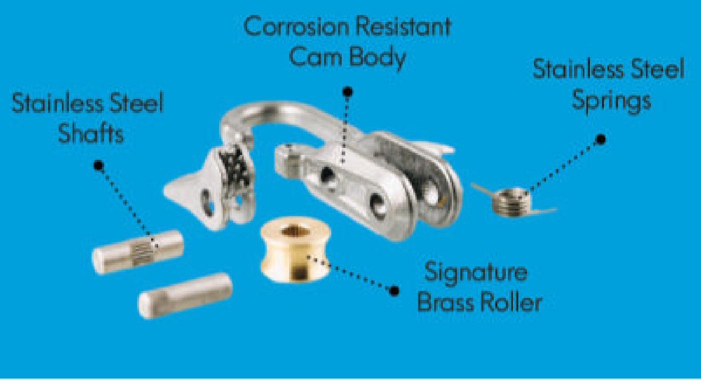
NEW FROM ROLLERCAM!

INTRODUCING ROPEROLLER.

THE GREATEST ROPE CAM EVER
roperoller®
A DARK CANYON, INC PRODUCT
US PATENT 10221918B2

THE GREATEST ROPE CAM, EVER.

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY AT **rollercam.com**


Corrosion Resistant Cam Body
Stainless Steel Shafts
Stainless Steel Springs
Signature Brass Roller

Using an all-new patented roller design, we've brought the technology of Rollercam® to the rope tightening and tensioning tool kit.

IDEAL FOR CANOPY, TENT, AND AWNING!

DESIGNED FOR 3 MM ACCESSORY ROPE

SCAN TO
SEE DETAILS

Water Sourcing, Filtration, and Storage

The knowledge you need to stay safely hydrated on the road.

ALUMINESS
Products Inc.

MODULAR SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE FOR SPRINTER, TRANSIT AND PROMASTER

MODULAR EXTERIOR STORAGE SOLUTIONS
FOR ANY ADVENTURE

INTRODUCING THE
Aluminess BackPack

- No Drilling
- Works With All Hinges
- Multiple Configurations

**BackPack only available for Sprinter and Transit*

WWW.ALUMINESS.COM

Eezi-Awn's NEW unique DragonFly 180° degree and Mini self-contained awnings will be available in the US in 2023
Eezi-Awn's K9 Roof Racks, Awnings and Accessories are the benchmark in the industry used by professionals world wide... which others strive to achieve.

Eezi-Awn very simply the very best...

39 Years Eezi-Awn K9 Rak

Eezi-Awn's USA Distributor is:
EQUIPT EXPEDITION OUTFITTERS
Salt Lake City, Utah
515 West Pickett Circle Suite 300
Salt Lake City, UTAH, USA
Tel: 1.866.703.1026
E-mail: sales@equipt1.com
Website: www.equipt1.com

TIP

Hoses should be flushed before being used, as chemicals in plastic hoses will contaminate standing water.

My son, Keegan, gathering and filtering water using the Lifesaver 20,000UF after a vehicle breakdown in the Rif Mountains of Morocco. We were stranded for four days and lucky to find a nearby spring. | We take advantage of purification depots when we can; this one was in Mulegé, Baja California Sur. | **Opening page:** The filtration and storage of safe, clean water is an absolute priority for long-distance overland travelers.

Camped beside a road in Ivory Coast, I filtered soupy rainwater from an old plastic barrel. I trusted my system but had to wonder—was the hard-working filter up to the task of removing chemicals, bacteria, and viruses? Was I hydrating my family with contaminated water despite my best efforts?

Water is life, and every overland traveler knows that the storage and consumption of safe, reliable water are essential components to your health and a successful journey. When consumed, improperly stored and treated water may lead to illnesses ranging from mild to severe. The outdoor and adventure accessory market overflows with products that promise the solution to clean, potable water, but often those products are not used correctly or are substandard. In consultation with Owen Mesdag, current product manager for Dometic and former senior product designer at Mountain Safety Research (MSR), we have broken down the water sourcing, filtration, and storage process.

WATER-BORNE ILLNESSES

Significant short-term threats include bacteria (E.coli, salmonella, hepatitis A), protozoa (giardia, cryptosporidium), parasites, and viruses (rotavirus, norovirus, etc.). Effects can be immediate, and their impact on health is one of the greatest risks for an overland traveler. These threats are easily removed by the diligent use of filters and purifiers.

Long-term health concerns from exposure to chemicals, pesticides, heavy metals (lead, mercury, arsenic, etc.), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can result from the sustained and continuous consumption of contaminated water. It stands to reason that there would be short-term effects as well. Your water storage and filtration process should address and eliminate the majority of these hazards; activated carbon filters, in particular, are good at reducing these elements.

MICROFILTRATION AND **ULTRAFILTRATION**

Effective filtration can be achieved through various processes, including running water through sand, clay, filter presses, or sedimentation. Microfiltration removes bacteria and suspended solids through the use of micro-porous membranes, while ultrafiltration removes viruses via more pressure and semipermeable membranes. The microfiltration and ultrafiltration processes we investigated range from hollow-fiber membranes, porous ceramic filters, or adsorption media such as granular activated carbon (GAC) to filter or separate contaminating substances from the water.

Membrane and ceramic filters are semi-permeable materials that utilize size exclusion to allow various particle sizes to either flow through or be trapped by the membrane. The degree of separation largely depends on particle size and membrane density (these processes will be discussed in detail below). Membrane filtration can remove various items such as particulates (dirt), bacteria, viruses, and organic material but will not remove color, taste, or chemicals. GAC, or carbon filtration, assists in improving odor and taste. When using bleach to purify water, carbon filters quickly become ineffective. Only when the water becomes foul-tasting will you realize that the carbon filter needs to be replaced.

THE FOUR STEPS TO **POTABLE WATER**

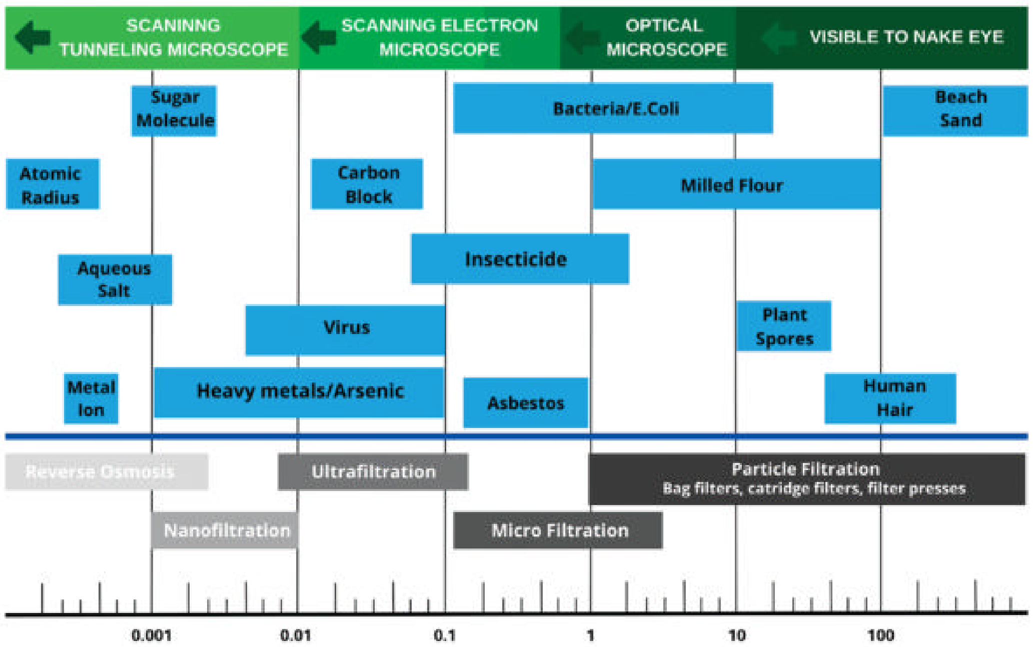
SOURCING (STEP 1)

Sourcing the cleanest water possible is essential. In our travels, we have found that many towns and cities have water treatment and sterilization facilities where municipal water is further processed and dispensed by hose or in 5-gallon bottles. Affordable and safe, we fill our water tanks at these places as often as possible. Occasionally, we have to source water directly from the municipal supply or a freshwater stream, well, or river.

Beware when sourcing unsterilized water, as its crystal-clear appearance is not an indicator of safety. Bacteria and viruses invisible to the naked eye can hide in plain sight and in the shadow of impurities, which means your ultraviolet water filter is perhaps not as effective as you might imagine. Clear water is only the first step in the process, and many filters are designed only to remove impurities and improve the taste. Consider the following when sourcing water.

- Hoses should be flushed before being used, as chemicals in plastic hoses will contaminate standing water (an example of a long-term threat).

PARTICLE FILTRATION SIZE CHART



Illustrated in micrometers (microns), this chart depicts the particle sizes of common objects and particulates and serves as a comparison chart for filtration from visible to microscopic contaminants.

TIP

Water from streams or rivers should be collected from the deepest area possible or where the water is mostly clear and free from debris. Flowing water is safest; above the river bed and a few inches below the surface is best.

- Water from streams or rivers should be collected from the deepest area possible or where the water is mostly clear and free from debris. Flowing water is safest; above the river bed and a few inches below the surface is best.
- Avoid stagnant water.
- Well water may seem clean but is often unreliable as local pollution of groundwater through industrial or agricultural practices may not be apparent but should be assumed.
- Municipal water is generally safe, depending on the country, and is treated with chlorine and fluoride, which are best removed with an activated carbon filter.
- Rainwater is usually pretty clean, but the surface or container it is collected from is likely not, resulting in contamination.

FILTER PARTICLES BY MICROFILTRATION (STEP 2)

Ideally, water should be sourced using a temporary storage solution such as a water bag and then filtered through a 0.1-micron filter (a 0.2-micron pore size is more common on available microfilters and is still effective) into a sterilized storage container. The filter will remove coarse particles, visible to the naked eye, from the size of beach sand to fine-milled flour (see chart) and will render the water transparent, improve taste, and prepare the water for the next stage of filtration. A 0.1-0.2 micron filter will remove some, but not all, bacteria and will not remove all viruses, lead, or heavy metals, but it is generally considered adequate preparation for consumption.

An all-too-common practice in the field is to filter dirty water entirely with a microfilter intended primarily for the removal of bacteria and particles. Remember, it is good practice to source water that is as clean as possible. By filtering large particles through such a filter, the user is blocking the filtration system, reducing its lifespan and effectiveness. It may be necessary to first let sourced water settle in a suitable container, allowing the majority of particulates to separate; this may take a few minutes. The water can then be "pre-filtered" through a suitable cloth (perhaps mutton or cheesecloth—even a clean sock will do) before beginning the process of microfiltration. If necessary, collapsible buckets and containers should be added to your water kit. Choosing water with the least amount of sediment is always the best choice and will prolong the microfilter's life.

Examples of microfilters include MSR's MiniWorks EX (ceramic) or Autoflow Gravity (hollow-fiber membrane). Other options include the Katadyn Vario and the Lifestraw Go.

ELIMINATE VIRUSES BY ULTRAFILTRATION (STEP 3)

Ultrafilters (or purifier filters) have the same advantage as microfilters but are also effective against viruses.

Drinking and cooking water must be bacteria and virus free. According to the New York State Department of Health, "Boiling water kills or inactivates viruses, bacteria, protozoa, and other pathogens by using heat to damage structural components and disrupt essential life processes (e.g., denature proteins). Boiling is not sterilization and is more accurately characterized as pasteurization. Sterilization kills all the organisms present, while pasteurization kills those organisms that can cause harm to humans."

Boiling water may inactivate viruses, bacteria, and protozoa, but contaminants like lead, nitrates, and pesticides are not affected by the boiling process. Boiling reduces the volume of water and therefore increases the concentration of these contaminants. It is best practice to bring water to a rolling boil for at least one minute; boil water for three minutes at elevations above 5,000 feet (1,500 meters).

This next stage of the filtration process is referred to as ultrafiltration and is achieved by using a filter with a recommended minimum pore size between 0.02 and 0.05microns. Once this process is completed, your water will be ready for consumption and storage. It is not necessary to filter bathing and washing water to this degree, but both consumable and "domestic" water should follow this process.

Examples of ultrafilter purifiers are the MSR Guardian and the LifeSaver Jerrycan. We used the Lifesaver Jerrycan 20000UF as we crossed West and Southern Africa and grew to trust and rely on it as our primary filter.

STORAGE AND PURIFICATION OF STORED WATER (STEP 4)

The rule of thumb is to only store clean water, free of all particles, bacteria, and viruses. It is not necessary to employ ultrafiltration of bulk water if stored water is treated with the correct dose of sodium hypochlorite (aka bleach), and the water has been through the microfiltration process. Treatment with bleach is a surefire way to protect your clean, stored water source from possible cross-contamination and to reduce bio-growth. Unfortunately, bleach has a limited shelf life, and you should not treat your water with bleaches that are scented, color-safe, or have added cleaners. Aqua Research's H2GO Purifier is a pocket-sized chlorine generator for treating small quantities of stored water, while the MSR SE200 Community Chlorine Maker is able to treat hundreds of liters safely. Both work by utilizing the process of electrolysis, passing an electric current through a saline "brine" which breaks down sodium chloride into chlorine. Chlorine is a natural element and an ingredient of bleach, while bleach is a solution and the product of combining chlorine and other chemicals. Both bleach and chlorine are highly effective water purifiers.

The following should be considered when treating stored water with (chlorine) bleach of either 6 or 8.25 percent.

- Use the table below to determine how much bleach you will need for the amount of water to be stored. A 1/2 teaspoon of 8.25 percent bleach will safely treat 8 gallons of water.
- Stir, and let the water stand for half an hour. The water should have a slight chlorine odor. If not, repeat the dosage and allow it to stand for 30 more minutes. If the smell is too strong, dilute the clean filtered water from a clean container and let it stand. With practice, you will perfect the concentration.

CHLORINE BLEACH TREATMENT CHART

VOLUME OF WATER	AMOUNT OF 6% BLEACH TO ADD*	AMOUNT OF 8.25% BLEACH TO ADD*
1 quart/liiter	2 drops	2 drops
1 gallon	8 drops	6 drops
2 gallon	16 drops (1/4 tsp)	12 drops (1/8 tsp)
4 gallon	1/3 teaspoon	1/4 teaspoon
8 gallon	2/3 teaspoon	1/2 teaspoon

* Bleach may contain 6 or 8.25% sodium hypochlorite. Sourced from epa.gov

10L
DOMETIC

A water bag is used to source, separate particulates through settlement, gravity feed, and filter water into a long-term storage container. | A hand-held pump is more efficient than a gravity-fed filtration system as the user can determine the flow rate, limited only by the flow capacity of the filter. | **Bottom left:** The Lifesaver 20,000UF in service in the Ivory Coast. | **Right:** Aqua Research's H2GO Purifier has an excellent reputation as a pocket-size chlorinator for treating vehicle-based stored water or larger quantities—at home or as a service to the remote villages you might encounter.

TIP

One 8-ounce cupful is sufficient drinking water per person per hour.

A Dometic Water Container and MSR SE200 Community Chlorine Maker. Chlorinater. Stored water treated with the correct quantities of chlorine will remain stable for long periods of time.

Common household iodine can also be used for sterilization but does not kill parasites. You likely have a tube of iodine in your medicine cabinet or first aid kit. Add five drops of 2 percent tincture of iodine to each quart or liter of water that you are disinfecting. If the water is cloudy or colored, add 10 drops of iodine. Stir, and let the water stand for at least 30 minutes before use.

USE WATER **SPARINGLY**

Water conservation is almost as important as effective water filtration to overlanders; the more careful you are with the use of your limited water resources, the longer you will be able to travel comfortably off-grid and the less effort you will need to expend on water filtration. This seemingly obvious suggestion can, in practice, be quite difficult for those raised in homes with indoor plumbing, where even today, water is not always considered a finite resource. How many of you leave the water running while you brush your teeth? Too many. The water supply in your rig is not connected to a faucet, and your habits will need to be adjusted.

METHODS TO **CONSERVE WATER**

USE A WATER CUP A cupful is enough to brush your teeth, wet your hair, and wash your face every morning. One 8-ounce cupful is sufficient drinking water per person per hour.

RETHINK PERSONAL HYGIENE When on the road, you do not have to shower or bathe every day, which is actually better for your skin and hair. Go for a swim if you come across a river, stream, or ocean. Even eco-friendly soaps have adverse effects on bodies of water; have a soapless wash in freshwater sources when you can. Give your hair a rinse and enjoy the water. Yes, the first people you come into contact with after two weeks in the bush will smell you, but you can't smell yourself, and neither can your family.

PACK WELL AND AVOID LAUNDRY Choose clothing that resists dirt and cleans and drys easily. Per week on the summer road, you essentially only need two pairs of trousers, two pairs of shorts, four or five T-shirts, a zip-up hoodie, and eight pairs of comfortable underwear. If you plan to be off-grid for a few weeks, stuff a laundry bag with the soiled, rolled clothing in anticipation of returning to civilization. If you must do laundry on the trail, wash only what you need.

COOK AND WASH DISHES WITH LESS WATER
A cup of rice (enough for a family of four) requires 2 cups of water, and a bag of spaghetti can be cooked with only 5 cups of water. Steaming vegetables requires only 1-2 cups of water and retains all the vitamins and nutrients. And, if you need an excuse to make a campfire, many delicious meat and vegetable meals can be prepared over hot coals.

Dishes use a lot of water, but there are a few things you can do to reduce your water use.

- Use compostable or disposable paper plates; this is not a long-term strategy.
- Use one pot or pan, cook in stages, and reheat the food before serving.
- Barbeque for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
- Wipe dishes with a cloth or paper towel before washing.
- For dishwashing, pour a tablespoon of biodegradable, eco-friendly soap into a cup and add 1/2 cup water. Dip the washing sponge into the mix and wash the dishes. To rinse, fill 1 cup with clean water and empty into a washed cup; repeat, then pour the water over the remaining dishes. Continue with this rinsing method until all the dishes are rinsed (they do not need to be 100 percent soap free), then dry with a kitchen towel and pack away.

CARRY PLENTY OF WATER
(BUT NOT TOO MUCH)

We carry 30 gallons of water for a family of four, spread between a 5-gallon external jerry can and two 15-gallon internal tanks. When possible, we also like to carry a large store-bought 2- or 3-gallon bottle. This is enough water for up to a week if used sparingly.

And, yes, you can carry too much water. Water is heavy, and it moves around as you drive. A vehicle loaded with too much water has to work a lot harder.

67
67d.com
Designed and Made with Care in Texas

Supporting Adventures Around the World Since 2012

© 67 Designs, LLC. All Rights Reserved..

DESIGNED.
TESTED.
BUILT.
EXPEDITION

Photo in partnership with Ford Motor Company

FIT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

The Expedition trailer has everything you need to take your family adventures to the next level. After a long day enjoying your outdoor fun, think about the comfortable and reliable setup you're returning to, refreshing you for the next day's adventures! That's what we're here for.

turtlebacktrailers.com

Moroccan Spiced Chicken over Couscous

A quick and easy one-skillet, camp-friendly meal.

Many traditional Moroccan recipes make use of a *tagine,* a cone-shaped earthenware cooking vessel that produces mouth-wateringly delicious braises. While traditional tagine cooking is absolutely incredible, it presents a couple of problems for overlanders.

First, many people don't own a tagine, much less have one they'd be willing to take out on a trip. Second, tagines need a long time to slowly simmer—not exactly ideal when the sun is setting, and dinner would be nice to have about now-ish.

So to speed up the process while retaining as much flavor as possible, we adapted this meal to be prepared in a cast iron skillet with a lid. It's a one-pot wonder but performed in two acts, aided by *ras el hanout,* a blend of ground cinnamon, coriander, black pepper, and other spices.

One layer of flavor builds onto the next, producing a camp-friendly meal with a lot of depth. If you're looking to expand your camping palate without a lot of extra work, then give this recipe a try.

SERVES 2
PREP AND COOK TIME 20 minutes
EQUIPMENT 10-inch cast iron skillet, lid for skillet, camp stove

CHICKEN
2 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
2 teaspoons ras el hanout
1 teaspoon salt (optional, if your ras el hanout blend does not already contain salt)
1 tablespoon olive oil

COUSCOUS
1/2 cup couscous
1/3 cup water
1 tablespoon oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup sliced almonds
8 dried apricots, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1/2 lemon, juiced
1/4 teaspoon ras el hanout

Coat the chicken thighs with 2 teaspoons *ras el hanout* (and 1 teaspoon salt if your ras el hanout blend does not contain salt). Heat a tablespoon of oil in a skillet over medium heat and add the chicken. Cook until the internal temperature reaches 165°F, turning once, about five to six minutes on each side. Once the chicken is browned on both sides and cooked through, remove it to allow it to rest.

Deglaze the hot skillet by adding 1/3 cup water to the pan and, working quickly, use a spatula or tongs to scrape up any brown bits stuck to the pan, lifting up the flavor-rich fond. Add the couscous, 1 tablespoon oil, and 1/4 teaspoon salt to the pan, cover, and remove from the heat. Let the couscous steam for five minutes until tender. In the meantime, slice the chicken into bite-sized pieces.

Once the couscous is tender, fluff with a fork and add the almonds, apricots, chopped parsley, lemon juice, and 1/4 teaspoon ras el hanout. Stir to combine. Serve the chicken over a bed of couscous.

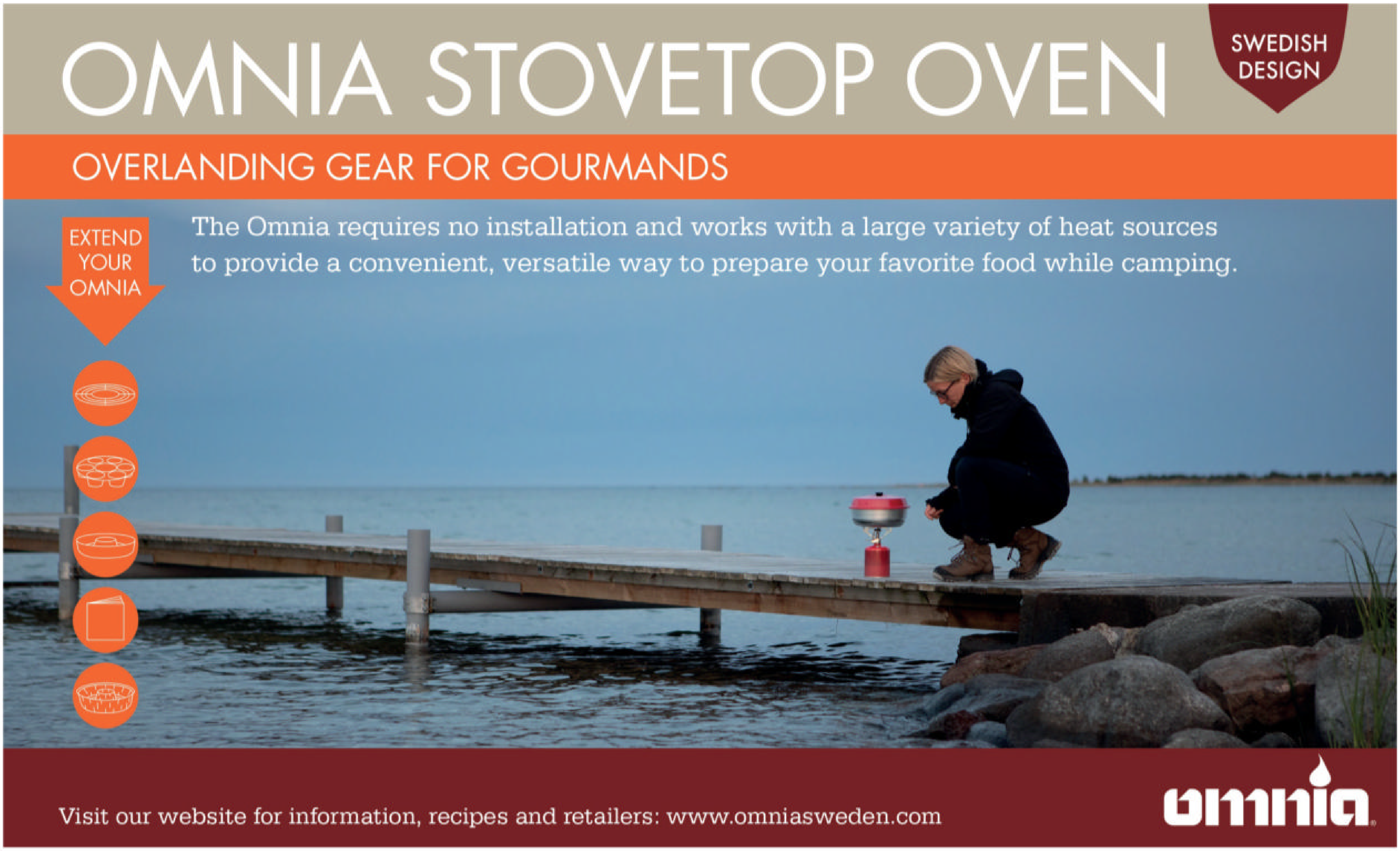
ENGEL®

TOUGH ENOUGH FOR ANY TERRAIN

WITH ENGEL AC/DC POWERED FRIDGES, YOU'LL NEVER NEED TO BUY ICE AGAIN.

Trusted by first responders/ EMTS, adventure travelers, and mariners around the world…Engel's 50+ year reputation for unmatched reliability and performance means you'll never worry about keeping your cool when you're on the move.

561-743-7419 | 888-272-9838 | ENGELCOOLERS.COM | 900 Jupiter Park Drive | Jupiter, FL 33458


OMNIA STOVETOP OVEN

SWEDISH DESIGN

OVERLANDING GEAR FOR GOURMANDS

EXTEND YOUR OMNIA

The Omnia requires no installation and works with a large variety of heat sources to provide a convenient, versatile way to prepare your favorite food while camping.

Visit our website for information, recipes and retailers: www.omniasweden.com

omnia®

Continued from page 152

Ranger Kate took command of the helicopter landing zone while distracting me with facts about endemic reptiles. | **Opening page:** Finding some peace and quiet while looking into one of nature's greatest creations.

feel the temperature and humidity increase at green oases that speckled down the trail. What really impressed us was the quality of the trail itself—it was a pure joy to hike the switchbacks and steep canyon traverses carved over time.

We made good time to the bottom of the canyon and were so ecstatic to see the Colorado River we decided to strip down and swim. I waded out and dove in, swimming against the current for about 20 feet, and was startled by how powerful the river was despite its slow-moving appearance. After drying off on the sand bar, I decided I needed to take one last dip in the water. In my two-feet-first zeal, I stood up, ran out into the water again, jumped high in the air in perfect cannonball posture, and *Snap!* Pain shot through my ankle and into my mind. I knew instantly what had happened. The murky water had disguised the bottom of the river. Had I taken one more stride out, I would have landed in the deep. But no, my ankle crumpled against something hard.

I crawled out of the water in disbelief. I tried to put weight on it, hoping it was a simple sprain. Nope. I lay on the beach covered in sand and knew my little cannonball move had altered everything: our hike and the remaining road trip. We were on the ninth day of what was meant to be a multi-month journey across the West. My mind raced through the itinerary of what we had planned for the coming weeks and months. I'd be canceling campsites, hotels, national park entries, and (gulp) Legoland. My wife and kids were going to be crushed.

I scooted myself into a shady spot in the sand and flicked ants off my body while staring at the protrusion on my fibula.

Adrenaline was coursing through my system at this point enough to work with my buddies to organize rescue logistics. I popped some 8-year-old painkillers, wrapped my lower leg in an Ace bandage, and forced on my hiking boot. I figured I could hike a couple of miles in this painful fashion, but the rim was nine miles away and 4,000 feet up. I then convinced my friends that a mule would be feasible and would save money. After about an hour of scenario planning, my buddy jogged laterally down the canyon in hopes of finding a ranger at Phantom Ranch. I scooted myself into a shady spot in the sand and flicked ants off my body while staring at the protrusion on my fibula.

After a long hour, my paladin returned and introduced me to Kate, the backcountry ranger. I tried to convince her that a mule evac would be an excellent and pragmatic plan. After my two-minute sales presentation, she said, "That's great; now let me tell you what's actually going to happen." She pointed out how painful the mule option would be and that the park service didn't want to chaperone me on a full-day mule slog. She told me a helicopter evacuation had already been called, and she was there to clear the landing zone. She took control. After another hour, a helicopter strafed the valley, and my heart started pounding. I can't afford a helicopter rescue. I can't be "that guy," the one that causes a dangerous helicopter evac.

My buddies had bailed and left me with Ranger Kate so they could get to the rim before nightfall. Ranger Kate distracted me with facts about a rattlesnake species endemic to the Canyon. Good to know. Ranger Kate also informed me the helicopter evac is free. Great to know. The chopper thundered into view, and sand whipped around. I had to hobble about 100 feet back up some rocks to avoid the swirling debris. It only took about 15 minutes for the helicopter to land, a flight suit and helmet to be put on me, and for my delivery to the ER on the rim of the canyon. Ranger Kate was right; this was way more efficient than my mule scenario.

We stayed in our camp a couple more nights in denial that our trip was over. Among other things, it was too painful to navigate rocks and tree roots just to go to the bathroom. It became apparent I was of little help to my wife with camp setup, cooking, driving, and road school lessons. We surrendered and packed up camp to work our way back home. We were fortunate that we had not yet rented our house, and we could fall back into our old safety net in suburbia. The kids went back to school, the wife picked up some shifts at the hospital, and our neighbors waved to us as if we had never left. Sadly, everyone seemed pretty darn happy to be back home after my fiasco.

Now that a couple of months have elapsed, I view my recovery time as a blessing. I'd been an overachieving energy developer for over a decade, and my mind was always switched on. Even during those first weeks of travel, my mind was in nonstop planning mode. Being injured and unemployed has slowed down life while providing new opportunities. It's as if a brush fire swept through, and spring growth is replacing the old foliage. I've been working on mothballed writing projects I always meant to get to and even tinkered with building a website—things I could never get to while working full time. Once the leg rehab is far enough along, we plan to overland to Central America for a few months. We've learned lessons about our camp setup and homeschool expectations that should help when we're back on the road. And I've realized I don't always have to jump with two feet first; sometimes, dipping a toe in the water is enough.

OVERLAND | JOURNAL

OVERLAND JOURNAL PODCAST

OVERLANDJOURNAL.COM/PODCAST/

- HOSTED BY SCOTT BRADY AND MATT SCOTT
- COVERS TOPICS LIKE PAYLOAD, TRAVELING IN AUSTRALIA, AND THE BEST USED VEHICLES
- INTERVIEWS WITH INDUSTRY STALWARTS LIKE CLAY CROFT AND DAN GREC

Jeep Wrangler Unlimited
Ford Bronco

URSA MINOR

www.ursaminorvehicles.com

Get Out There

Toyota Trails Magazine

Toyota Land Cruiser Association Since 1976

info at
www.tlca.org
(800) 655-3810

Broken Leg on Bright Angel

Shifting gears after a painful life lesson.

I've always been the kind of person to jump into things with two feet first. I had an excellent job in the solar industry but spontaneously quit so I could have a chance to reimagine my life. We'd pulled our kids from school and embarked on a journey filled with life lessons on the road. We sold a bunch of our belongings in a garage sale and passed off our cat to a nearby family. We committed to our souped-up Toyota Tundra being our base camp and home. It's this "two feet first" mentality that invigorates life, but it's this same state of mind that got me into trouble while at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

The first few days of our new life had their challenges. We realized we were 100 percent together *all the time.* We were not only the parents and teachers for our children but also expected to fill the void of friends and playtime. I knew this going in, and that's what I wanted, to spend quality time with my kids before they grow up. Our daughter quickly acclimated to lessons on the road—she even started writing little books about each place we were visiting and would discuss the animals, scenery, history, and our experiences. It was the exact outcome I had daydreamed about. Our son, on the other hand, battled us at every corner, every attempt to complete a lesson. It was high drama and body-tensing anxiety for my wife and me.

Despite these challenges, it was going pretty well. We'd camped and hiked at Mesa Verde National Park, the Petrified Forest National Park, and an Overland Expo in Flagstaff, Arizona. We then had a full week of camping and exploring the Grand Canyon. Our good friends and mirror-image family would accompany us for the next six days. It was perfect; the kids entertained each other, the moms hung out in camp discussing health food, while the dads sat by the fire solving the world's problems. Everyone was in their happy place.

As most long-term travelers are accustomed, these big trips come with extreme highs and lows. It's what we want when we leave our comfortable little rat wheels back home—a heightened sense of living. I was on a high during the beginning of our Grand Canyon segment. We had a spine-tingling night with rain, thunder, and bull elk bugling around our campsite. We had multiple good hikes around the Grand Canyon Rim. Our kids were content making forts and planning pine cone attacks on each other. To add to the icing on the cake, I talked my buddies into doing a day mission to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back while our families had a quiet camp day. The plan was set.

We started our descent of the Bright Angel Trail at the crack of dawn. A light fog burned off the canyon rim, and phosphorescent orange swirls began lighting up the sky. My buddies and I had grown up together playing soccer, skateboarding, skiing, and various other activities that abused our 40-year-old knees. We thought our knees would be our only impediment to success. We were blown away by the immensity of the Grand Canyon and its many folds and layers that revealed themselves as we got deeper. We were surprised to

Continued on page 150

DON'T
ARRIVE AT YOUR
DESTINATION.
DISCOVER IT.
0.7mi
County Road 567
Lake City
Redcloud Peak
Whitecross Mountain
Handies Peak
American Peak
Edith Mountain
Jones Moun
10mph Speed
21°F Temperature
13mi Distance
8:22A Arrival
GARMIN
ROAM THE UNKNOWN
TREAD XL
OVERLAND EDITION
ALL-TERRAIN NAVIGATOR
GARMIN.

© 2022 Garmin Ltd. or its subsidiaries.

authentic